

UN slams Khartoum

THE UN Security Council held its final debate yesterday on a draft resolution asking Sudan to extradite to Ethiopia three men suspected of taking part in the attempt to assassinate President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa last June.

The council was expected to approve the resolution, which gives Khartoum 60 days to extradite the men, in its session late yesterday. The resolution was drafted by non-aligned members of the council, including Egypt, upon a request from Ethiopia last month. It does not call for any sanctions against Sudan, but further action might be taken if Khartoum fails to comply with the resolution, UN sources said.

Jihad nipped

SECURITY forces have arrested 45 Islamist militants who allegedly planned to revive the extremist group Jihad to carry out a series of attacks against key installations, security figures and religious scholars, the Interior Ministry announced yesterday.

The suspects were arrested in a sweeping crackdown on their hideouts in the governorates of Alexandria, Port Said and Qalubia over the past few days, the ministry statement added.

Gaza re-vote

PALESTINIAN voters returned to the polls in two sprawling refugee camps north of Gaza City yesterday, to recast their ballots following complaints of massive irregularities in the first round of elections on 20 January.

Losing candidates in the two constituencies said ballot boxes had been fraudulently stuffed and that policemen pressured voters to choose candidates from Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction. The Central Election Commission said that the final results for the 88-member council would be announced on 20 February after all complaints had been investigated.

Likud retreat

HARDLINE members of Israel's opposition Likud Party called for their leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, yesterday to accept peace agreements with the PLO as a fact of life.

The Likud Party figures, known for their strong opposition in the past to giving up any territory to the Palestinians or to recognising the PLO, said Netanyahu should announce his commitment to the peace process with the PLO in case the party wins the coming parliamentary elections in either June or October. The Likud leader told the Associated Press he was planning to convene a party leadership meeting to reach a final stand on this matter.

Aegean strife

GREECE and Turkey withdrew their troops from around a disputed island in the Aegean Sea after heavy US pressure defused the worst armed escalation between them since 1987.

The war of words continued between the two sides, however, with each country claiming ownership of the tiny uninhabited island. In Athens, Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis told parliament the Isle of Imiwas was Greek, and ruled out negotiations with Turkey on this issue. But in Ankara, Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller said Turkey secured the lowering and removal of the Greek flag from the island, known as Kardak by the Turks.

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Little action in Wye talks

US SECRETARY of State Warren Christopher returned to the Syrian-Israeli peace talks at the Wye plantation near Washington Tuesday "to take the temperature of what is happening." But by all accounts, not much is happening, the Associated Press reported.

State Department spokesman Glyn Davis declined to evaluate the status of the negotiations in announcing Christopher's second intervention in two weeks. Secrecy and the participation of Syrian and Israeli generals have failed so far to break the deadlock, raising questions about how much Christopher can accomplish if he goes to Jerusalem and Damascus next week as planned.

Even the usually upbeat State Department has ceased issuing statements of progress as the talks continue to founder over who makes the first move: Israel with a promise to give up all of the strategic Golan Heights border enclave or Syria with explicit terms of the peace it would swap for the land it lost in the 1967 War.

Deadlocked on that, the negotiators are focusing almost exclusively on another major issue: how to prevent a surprise attack across the border between Israel and Syria.

The participation of Syrian and Israeli generals had signalled a potential compromise on security arrangements. But there was no word of a breakthrough, despite the persistent efforts of US mediator Dennis Ross. He even tried some homespun, secret diplomacy Sunday by having the chief negotiators, Walid Al-Moualem of Syria and Uri Savir of Israel, over to his suburban Maryland home.

There, they did some negotiating while catching glimpses on television of the Dallas Cowboys-Pittsburgh Steelers Super Bowl.

Reporters and photographers remain barred from the Wye plantation in the US belief that the talks will go better if participants are not approached for assessments and if they bargain in a bucolic setting in a relaxed, shirt-sleeves mode.



photo: Sherif Samir

QUALITY OF MERCY: Ramadan is not only a month of fasting but also of mercy, when Muslims are instructed to reach out to the needy. Keeping up a tradition that probably began in Fatimid times, the wealthy spread

out iftar banquets in the streets of Cairo and other cities. The underprivileged, along with any passers-by, are welcome to join the feast, which begins with the call for maghreb (sunset) prayers. It is estimated that 10,000 peo-

ple are served free meals in Cairo every day. Above, a man waits patiently for the sun to go down at a table in the affluent district of Mohandessin. Judging by the empty seats around him, he has a long wait.

Planning for the region

Middle East economic talks in The Hague this week underpinned the precedence of integrated planning over joint projects, as Samia Nkrumah finds out

The multilateral economic talks held in the Netherlands on Tuesday were an outcome of the second Middle East/North Africa economic summit (MENA) that took place in Amman last October. Their uniqueness stems from an emphasis on careful planning before implementing joint projects.

Senior government officials from the four core countries involved in the peace process — Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinians and Israel — met in the Hague for "exploratory talks" on regional economic cooperation in the first ever publicised meeting at ministerial level. The respective delegations were led by Egyptian Economic Minister Nawal Tawfiq, Jordanian Planning Minister Rima Khalaf, Palestinian Minister of International Cooperation, Nabil Shaath and the Israeli minister in charge of the peace process, Yossi Beilin.

A leading Egyptian delegate, Raouf Saad, assistant foreign minister for regional cooperation, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* after the meeting that the talks must be regarded as an "endeavour to gauge a futuristic approach to regional economic cooperation in the Middle East". Hence the relatively low-key atmosphere surrounding the one-day meeting.

"We don't want to raise expectations at this stage," said Saad. He stressed that the aim of the talks was not "to address specific joint projects per se, but instead to examine prospects for different areas of cooperation". So any joint projects that materialised after this stage would be by-products of careful planning, he noted.

Israeli delegate, Alon Liel, director general of the Israeli Ministry of Economic Planning told the *Weekly* that the Hague talks were "at a level above the projects".

"A regional planning forum was created for the first time in the Hague", he explained. "Many projects will be put in place under this umbrella. We felt that we needed a regional planning forum before embarking on the project themselves. Then we will be able to convince decision-makers in each country of the

feasibility of proposed joint projects." In a press statement, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the broadening of the peace process would allow other countries in the region to be included in future discussions.

The ministry confirmed that the Netherlands had been approached at the Amman summit to play the role of facilitator. A first round of official talks took place on 30 November 1995 in the Hague. The Dutch government hosted the talks and is committed to financing the research work of a team of experts chosen from the four countries. Specialists were selected for extensive training in planning at Harvard University, which explained the presence of a number of American professors at the meeting.

Delegates agreed that specific projects are best dealt with under other forums such as the Regional Economic Development Working Group (REDWG). According to Raouf Saad, a predominant concern at the talks was to "avoid

duplicating ongoing activities in other forums". Since MENA II, REDWG has addressed various issues of trade, infrastructure and tourism in meetings in December and January. Chairmanship of REDWG's various sectoral committees for 1996 are distributed among the four core countries: finance goes to Egypt; infrastructure, Jordan; tourism, the Palestinian Authority (PA); and trade, Israel.

A senior delegate at the Hague talks acknowledged that focusing on regional planning would crystallise "the relative advantages of the region and of each country". In practice, this means that once comparative advantages of a country in a specific area, such as tourism, is pinpointed, joint development projects with another state in the region with similar advantages could be effectively implemented.

Liel confirmed that about seven joint projects were discussed on the margin of the talks. These include three tourist projects, two energy-related projects — a gas pipeline link and an electricity grid — and others related to

transport and commerce. Subsequent MENA summits will be judged by the extent of the involvement of the international community in the economic aspect of the peace process. Donors at the Conference on Economic Assistance to the Palestinian People held in Paris in January pledged \$1.3 billion to the Palestinians.

An overall approach to the development of the region is of particular relevance to the Palestinians. "They are at the critical stage of creating what might be a state in the future", commented Liel. The PA is also cooperating with Israel in the process of taking over the functions of the Israeli Civilian Administration. Similarly, Jordan's trade accord with Israel is integrated into their bilateral peace agreement.

Another aspect touched upon in the Hague talks is intra-Arab trade. The need for "inward" investment to complement "outward" foreign investment is another challenge facing MENA III in Cairo in November this year.

Fade-out time for the PLO?

The PLO headquarters in the Tunisian capital, Tunis — once so important that in October 1985 the Israelis bombed it — is now a skeleton, the remnants of which are scattered across four or five villas.

Money and power have gradually shifted to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), now based on an 88-member self-rule council, which was elected by Palestinians inside the Gaza Strip and West Bank on 20 January.

The lack of activity in Tunis underlines the fading influence of the PLO, which once ran an enormous, multimillion-dollar administration and a guerrilla army, equipped with tanks, artillery and missiles. A disheartened Shafik Al-Hout, former member of the PLO's executive committee, believes that there is nothing left for the PLO to do. He told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview from Lebanon: "Everything is in the hands of the elected Palestinian Authority."

According to Al-Hout, there is only one thing left before the organisation is "laid to rest": that is, the signing of the final status agreement with Israel, negotiations for which are due to begin in May of this year.

After its creation in 1964, the PLO imposed the Palestinian cause onto the world agenda. With the backing of Arab oil money, it won international recognition, placing at least as many diplomatic missions abroad as Israel.

Most of all, the PLO set as its main goal the return of around three million Palestinian refugees and their descendants who were uprooted from their homes in 1948 and 1967. But these Palestinians in the diaspora were not included in the recent elections for the legislative council in the West Bank and Gaza.

Al-Hout is dismissive of those elections. In his opinion, "Carrying out elections under the control of a foreign power is a fake. Our election was organised according to decisions taken by an Israeli-Palestinian committee which decided who was acceptable [as candidates] and who was not."

"The elected council," he added, "does not derive its authority from Palestinians but from Israel. This is according to the clauses of the [Oslo] agreement."

The newly elected PNA does not have the authority or ability to deal with the Israelis, argues Al-Hout. But it is the body which Israel would prefer to work with. "The Israelis want an organisation that works under the ceiling of Oslo," the Palestinian National Council (PNC),

Will the election of a Palestinian council strike a final nail in the PLO's coffin, and will the planned PNC meeting to amend the National Charter be its final act. Sherine Bahaa seeks an answer

on the other hand, has not approved the Oslo agreements. As the parliament-in-exile of the PLO, it has a wider and more historical mandate. But there is also a stronger presence of opponents and critics of the current peace process in the PNC than in the newly formed legislative council.

Al-Hout is anxious that Arafat makes use of the PNC as leverage against Israel. "What cards does Arafat have that he can use in bargaining with Israel in their final talks?" he asks. "Syria and Israel are about to reach an agreement, thus rounding off the circle of reconciliation between Israel and Arabs."

Feroq Kaddoumi, the PLO's foreign minister, speaking to the *Weekly* from Tunis, sounds a more optimistic tune. He argues that the elections for a legislative council were also "partial elections to the PNC". He sees the PNA as a continuation of the PNC.

Abdel-Jawad Salah, an independent member of the legislative council and a member of the PNC, believes that the PLO still has a vital role to play. "The PLO has to be there as long as there are refugees. If they succeed in solving the issue and refugees return, then the PLO, I think, should be like the Jewish Agency [a branch of the International Zionist Agency] in Israel."

The PLO, he explains, is responsible for negotiating the final phase agreement with Israel which deals with crucial issues such as Jerusalem, refugees, water, passages between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israeli settlements and Palestinian sovereignty.

The Palestinian council, on the other hand, will be responsible for laying down the framework for the future constitution of an independent state. It will be the council's role to define the respective powers of the president, the legislative council, and the judiciary. It will also be responsible for other issues such as safeguarding the freedom of the press and Palestinian detainees

in Israeli prisons, he said.

One of the first demands made by Israel in the wake of the Palestinian elections was for the PLO's charter to be amended as required by the Oslo agreement. Israel wants the cancellation of all clauses that call for a democratic secular state on all Palestinian land, as a pre-requisite for proceeding along the peace track.

Kaddoumi argues that before taking any steps towards changing the charter, Palestinians must have sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza Strip. If that happened, predicted Kaddoumi, "We will even replace our charter with a constitution which has no such clauses." At present, however, Israel still calls the West Bank "Judea and Samaria". It is Israel, argues Kaddoumi, which lacks credibility and so decisions cannot be made hastily. "We have to wait and see whether Israel is willing to withdraw or does it plan to absorb the West Bank."

Despite the need to address the changed environment, Al-Hout says only Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres has called for a meeting of the PNC. "Neither the PNA nor the head of the PNC has called for a meeting, issued an agenda or discussed the whereabouts of the meeting", Al-Hout said.

Such a meeting is needed, bringing together the PNC, its 18-member executive committee and leading Palestinian figures, according to Al-Hout, not to answer Israeli calls, but to find answers to the questions which "we have in our minds".

At the top of this list of questions is the issue of empty seats inside the PNC. There are 180 seats allocated to Palestinians from inside the Occupied Territories, of which 88 seats are for members of the new council. What will happen to the rest of the seats is still unknown.

Convening a meeting of the PNC is fraught with difficulties. Many PNC members are "wanted" by Israel and only 10 of them were allowed to attend the elections. Although Israel has said it will allow all PNC members to return to the self-rule areas to facilitate the amendment of the charter, its assurances have not always proved reliable in the past. The journey back will not be an easy one.

"Will I go on the basis of a promise by Peres that I will not be detained?" asked Al-Hout. "Shall I go under Israeli protection and get my visa from the Israeli Embassy in Amman or Cairo?"

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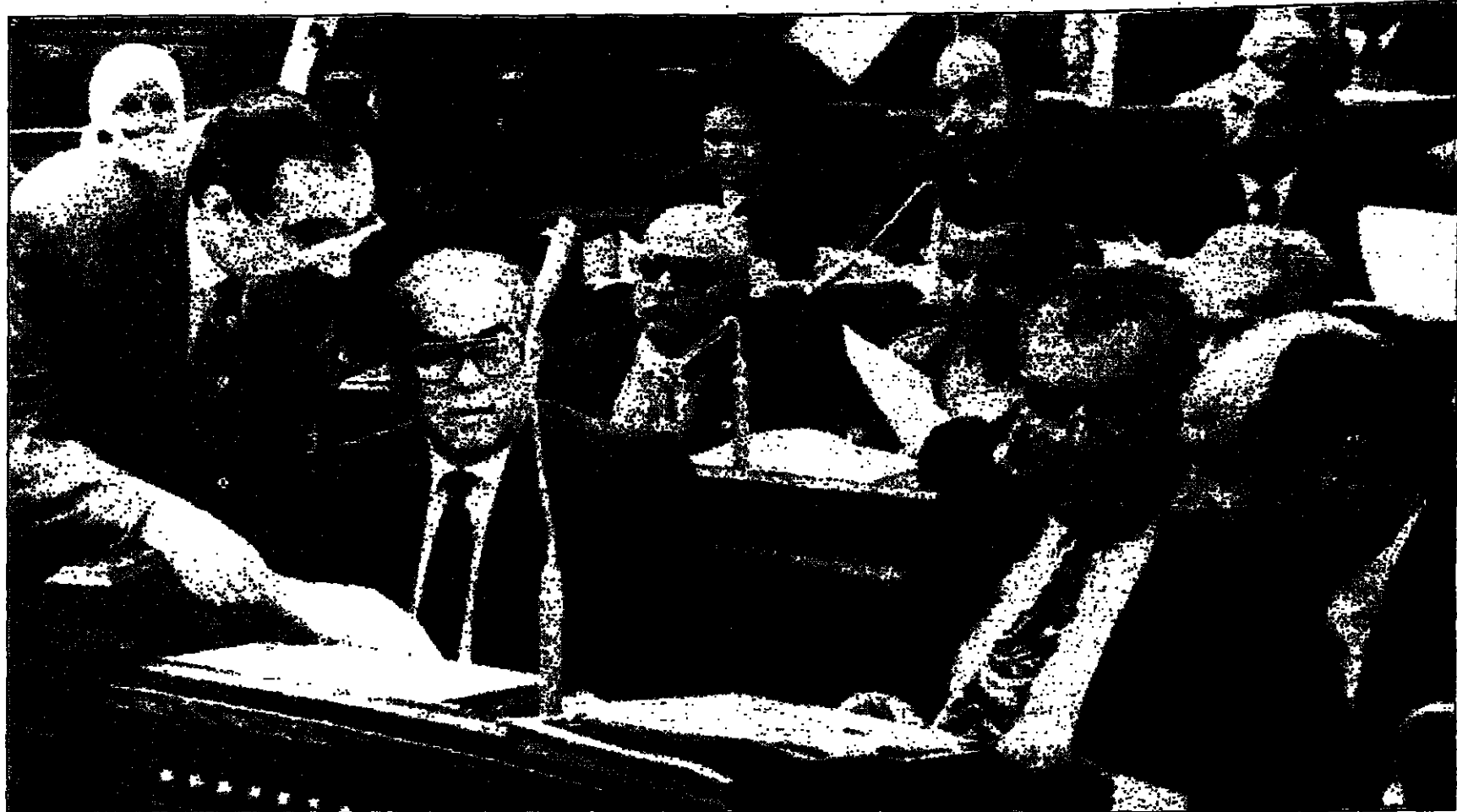
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Mixed reaction to hesba law

A law allowing personal status lawsuits citing *hesba* to be filed only by the prosecution authorities has been approved by the People's Assembly, but drew a mixed reaction from Islamic scholars and human rights activists. Gamal Essam El-Din and Amira Howeldy report



Making the law: (l-r) MP Zakaria Azmi, PM Kamal El-Ganzouri, MP Kamal El-Shazli and Housing Minister Ibrahim Suleiman during a parliamentary session

The People's Assembly approved a new law on Monday designed to deny Islamist lawyers the right to use the Islamic principle of *hesba* to file lawsuits in the civil courts demanding the breakup of the marriages of writers and academics whom they consider to be heretics. The law "to regulate the procedures of filing *hesba* lawsuits in personal status affairs" gives this right to prosecution authorities alone. The law, passed by parliament in a matter of hours, drew a mixed reaction. While some opposition figures and Islamic scholars threw their weight behind it, human rights groups condemned it as inadequate and demanded the abolition of the use of *hesba* altogether.

In Islamic jurisprudence, *hesba* is the right of every Muslim to take legal action against another Muslim or group of Muslims whom he believes have inflicted harm on Islam or violated Islamic teachings. A group of Islamist lawyers and sheikhs, led by Youssef El-Badri, successfully used this principle last summer to wrest an order from an appeals court to break up the marriage of Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, a professor of Arabic literature, and Ibtihal Youness, a lecturer in French literature, on the grounds that Abu Zeid was an apostate. Under Islamic law, a Muslim woman can only be married to a Muslim man. Abu Zeid and his wife are currently living in The Netherlands.

In a recent press interview, El-Badri said he had plans for lawsuits against 40 other intellectuals and writers, among them Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz. El-Badri claims that Mahfouz's alleged personification of God and the prophets in his novel *Children of Gebelawi* brands him as an apostate.

The new law states that "prosecution authorities alone have the right to file lawsuits related to personal status affairs on the basis of *hesba*. Anyone who wants to initiate legal proceedings should file a complaint with the relevant prosecution department, explaining the subject of his request and the reasons for it and attaching documents supporting his viewpoint. The prosecution authorities, after hearing the testimony of the concerned parties and conducting the necessary investigation, will then decide whether to file a

lawsuit with the competent court of the first instance or to shelve the complaint."

The attorney-general has the final say under the new legislation. He has the right to reverse previous decisions within 30 days. If he cancels an earlier decision, he should then continue the investigation and take a final decision either by referring the matter to court or shelving the complaint.

If the prosecution authorities decide to file a lawsuit, they will act as the plaintiff, assuming a plaintiff's rights and duties. The person who originally complained to the prosecution authorities has no right to take any part in the legal proceedings or to contest the court's decision.

Before approving the law, the People's Assembly added a new article stating that the courts should refer any *hesba*-based personal status lawsuits currently before them back to the prosecution authorities. The prosecution authorities will then take charge of these cases in accordance with the provisions of the new law.

Parliamentary majority leader Ahmed Abu Zeid told the house that the law was meant to regulate, rather than prevent, *hesba* lawsuits. The reason for its introduction was that public opinion had been taken aback by an "avalanche of cases filed by a well-organised group with the aim of terrorising intellectuals".

The law conformed to the rules of *shari'a*, he said, but was designed to protect society from the exploitation of religion or of *shari'a*. "Islam urges man to exercise his intellectual abilities, but some people have come forward, seeking to restrict [freedom of] thought in the name of Islam and to divorce men from their wives in the name of Islam. This law authorises the prosecution authorities to act on behalf of society in this connection."

Yassin Serageldin, leader of the opposition Wafd group in the House, declared his support for the law, describing it as "well balanced and with adequate guarantees for all interested parties". He urged the house to approve the law in order to stop "this craze for defaming citizens". Serageldin argued that although *hesba* was based on *shari'a*, the purpose of *shari'a* was to defend a man and his

family, while several *hesba* cases had been filed purely for publicity purposes, by people whose motives were suspect.

Speaking for the leftist Tagammu Party, Raafat Seif commented that any discussion of *hesba* could not be isolated from the issues of extremism and terrorism "which not only threaten the government and the ruling party, but Egyptian society as a whole". While praising police confrontation of terrorists, Seif said that the problem of terrorism needed to be considered in its wider context. "There has been no comprehensive confrontation, including a political and intellectual confrontation," he said.

"The issue now is that we are in a confrontation with those who use the weapon of apostasy against society's symbols, led by Naguib Mahfouz. What helped the dissemination of extremism and the branding of people as apostates is that some religious leaders resorted to using the same weapon used by extremists."

"Unfortunately, some of them were honoured by the state, while others were given room by some state institutions and information media to propagate their ideas about apostasy."

In Seif's view, the new law falls short of providing a comprehensive confrontation of extremism and terrorism. The new law still gave extremists the right to report cases to the prosecution authorities, which would then be obliged to investigate and listen to the testimony of the claimant, defendant and witnesses. "This is enough to achieve the aims of the extremists, because they will be given the opportunity to accuse others of apostasy," he said.

Ragab Hemida, speaking for the Liberal Party, said he approved of any law that aimed at implementing *shari'a*, but expressed reservations about labelling "those who play a role within the context of *shari'a* as 'terrorists'". Recalling that the second article of the constitution names *shari'a* as the principal source of legislation, Hemida said that "some were being deprived of this right [protecting *shari'a*] under the pretext that they [are extremists] wearing the cloak of religion." While *shari'a* respected freedom of thought, it also sought to protect "mind, soul and honour. Some of those who filed

these cases sought to protect honour and soul", he asserted, adding: "I also have questions to raise about those who write against religion in the name of secularism and seek to corrupt the ethics of society."

Alli Fath El-Bab of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, agreed that the second article of the constitution should be enforced. "I hope the government will submit more laws that are in line with Islamic *shari'a*," he said.

However, Ayman Nour, a Wafdist, rejected the argument that *hesba* was part of Islamic *shari'a*. "I have not found a single religious text that mentions *hesba*," he said. "Even in linguistic terms, there are conflicting interpretations as to what it means."

While many opposition figures approved the law, a group of 25 opposition and independent deputies issued a statement objecting to the haste with which this, and other pieces of legislation, have been passed.

Outside the Assembly, human rights activists demanded the abolition of *hesba* altogether. "The law does not abolish *hesba* as a tool which can be used against intellectuals and their ideas, but instead restricts its use to an official authority," commented Hisham Mubarak, head of the Centre for Human Rights Legal Aid. "In this way, use of *hesba* continues to contradict basic democratic principles and fails to confront violations of fundamental freedoms carried out both by the state and some non-governmental parties."

"*Hesba* contradicts the right of equality enshrined in Article 40 of the constitution. Egyptian nationality includes people of different religions, and is based on the concept of citizenship. There should be no differentiation between citizens based on religion or gender. *Hesba*, however, does differentiate between citizens on this basis," he said.

Secretary-general of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) Negad El-Borai, agreed that the law was inappropriate and insufficient. "This law will not be enough to curb the fundamentalist tide," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The only effective action would be to abolish *hesba* altogether. Although the law confines the right to file

lawsuits to the prosecution authorities, it is always possible that a prosecution official would be sympathetic with the fundamentalist tide."

El-Borai pointed out that the court order divorcing Abu Zeid from his wife was issued by a court of appeals judge. "How would I know that a prosecution official will be any better?" he asked.

Islamic scholars, however, approved of the new law. "After *hesba* was misused to intimidate public figures and intellectuals, it was very wise to regulate it in this way," asserted Kamal Abul-Magd, a lawyer and former minister of information. According to Abul-Magd, the concept of *hesba* is not solely an Islamic one. He said the principle was of Latin origin and was currently enforced in Scandinavian countries. "What the government did is both acceptable to and compatible with *shari'a* and is the best way to stop this wave of lawsuits that has exhausted the judicial system." He described the call to abolish *hesba* altogether as "irresponsible".

Mohamed Selim El-Awwa, another lawyer and Islamic scholar, agreed with Abul-Magd, describing the new law as "very well structured". It would, he said, be "impossible" to abolish *hesba* altogether.

But this opinion was not held by lawyers across the board. Said El-Ashmawi, former chief of the Cairo criminal court, agreed with the Wafd Party's Ayman Nour that *hesba* was not actually part of Islamic *shari'a*. "Hesba was not mentioned in the Qur'an or Prophet Mohamed's sayings. It appeared in Islamic history as part of the political system, and was later supported by theological interpretations." Furthermore, he argued that the new law officially reintroduced the use of *hesba*, when it could be considered to have already been abolished. "The new law, instead of solving the problem, actually legalised *hesba* after it had been abolished with the abolition of the *shari'a* courts in 1955," he said.

The Tagammu Party's Seif concurred that the use of *hesba* had previously been abolished. He sees the new law as a step backwards. "Use of *hesba* was actually abolished in 1955," he said. "The new law does not nullify *hesba* cases. Instead it codifies them into law, thus representing a submission to the extortion of extremists."

Six MPs lose immunity

The People's Assembly decided on Sunday to strip six of its members of parliamentary immunity so they could be investigated by prosecution authorities — four for alleged financial malpractices, the fifth for suspected murder and the sixth for manslaughter. The Assembly was acting on the request of Minister of Justice Farouk Seif El-Nasr and with the declared approval of the six members concerned.

In the case of the first five deputies, the Assembly was reversing a 30 December decision, which turned down the justice minister's request for the removal of immunity and merely allowed the five to testify before prosecution officials. It was the first time the Assembly discussed the case of the sixth deputy.

The four deputies accused of committing financial irregularities were named as: Tewfik Abdou Ismail, chairman of the Assembly's Plan and Budget Committee and board chairman of the Commercial Bank of Daqahliya, and businessmen Khaled Hamed Mahmoud, Mahmoud Azam and Ibrahim Aglan.

According to the justice minister's report, Mahmoud, Azam and Aglan used forged documents to obtain large loans from the Commercial Bank of Daqahliya and the Nile Bank without putting up adequate collateral. Azam's wife, Aleya El-

Six parliamentarians were stripped of their immunity by the People's Assembly, so they can face investigation by the prosecution authorities

Ayyouti, who was vice-president of the Nile Bank at the time, used her position to provide the three businessmen with loans amounting to LE179 million which were not listed in the bank's books. Ismail, in his capacity as chairman of the Commercial Bank of Daqahliya, was accused of providing Aglan's brother, Yassin, with more than LE200 million in loans against the payment of hefty commissions. Ismail and Mahmoud were further accused of using "threats" as well as their parliamentary immunity to force other banks to provide them with loans without collateral.

Addressing the Assembly, Ismail said the four deputies were ready to have their immunity lifted "because we have what it takes to prove our innocence — a clean page of honour and hard work to serve Egypt's interests. We are completely ready to testify and to be investigated and we will be back to you soon, with our honour and dignity restored."

"Some newspapers used the occasion to ridicule leaders of the National Democratic Party," he added. "It was also said that we planned to flee Egypt, but this is im-

possible because we have our roots in this country. As to the claim that we used tactics to force banks to provide us with loans, I appeal to any banker who had to deal with those tactics to come forward to testify before the People's Assembly or prosecution authorities."

Aglan, a board member of the Daqahliya Bank and a newcomer to the Assembly, said his name had not been mentioned in the past in connection with this case: "It was mentioned only after I became a parliamentary deputy." He, too, stressed that he wanted his immunity lifted.

After the decision to strip the four "loan deputies", as they have been dubbed by the Arabic-language press, of their immunity, the Assembly moved to debate the justice minister's request concerning Ahmed Fouad Abaza, MP for the Shariya constituency of Abu Hamad.

According to the prosecutor's report, Abaza was caught inside his car with an automatic rifle and 24 bullets on 7 December — the day following the election runoffs. He was accused of inciting his supporters to interfere in the vote-counting

process and is suspected of shooting and killing two citizens in a polling station.

Abaza told the Assembly that he had been remanded in custody for 14 days and, upon his release, immediately requested the Assembly's permission to testify before prosecution authorities to "refute the false accusations concocted by my election rivals. I have now submitted another request asking that my immunity be dropped so that I may testify before prosecution authorities because I have full confidence in their integrity. I also have full confidence in my innocence."

The Assembly decided to drop Abaza's immunity and then moved to the case of Abdel-Aziz Mustafa, chairman of the Assembly's Manpower Committee and board chairman of the Misr Insurance Company. According to a police report, Mustafa was driving along the Tibbin-Helwan road, south of Cairo, when he hit a child on a bicycle with his car. The boy was killed.

Mustafa told the Assembly that he wanted his immunity lifted "because we are all equal before the law. A member of parliament has no privileges." Declaring that he has confidence in the "justice of the judiciary", Mustafa said he would prove that the child's death was a case of manslaughter.

GE

EOHR appeal for stranded Palestinians

The Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights has highlighted the plight of the 200 Palestinians stranded along the Egyptian-Libyan border for the past four months

The Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) has appealed to the Egyptian and Libyan governments, the Palestinian National Authority and UN relief organisations to intervene immediately to end the sufferings of some 200 Palestinians who have been living in inhumane conditions along the Egyptian-Libyan border for more than four months.

The stranded Palestinians include 19 men who are married to Egyptians; their wives and more than 50 children are living in Egypt, according to a statement read out by EOHR Secretary-General Negad El-Borai at a news conference on Sunday. The majority of camp residents, 147 people, hold travel documents issued by Egypt to residents of the Gaza Strip. Seventy also carry temporary permits to visit self-rule areas in Gaza and the West Bank issued by Israel.

But, following the decision of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi to end the contracts of all 30,000 Palestinians working in Libya, Israel cancelled this type of permit, known as the white paper, fearing a flow of Palestinians into Gaza. "So those 200 Palestinians stranded on the border have nowhere to go. Libya has terminated their work contracts and they are no longer allowed to enter Libya; despite the fact that they hold Egyptian travel documents, Egypt does not allow them entry without a visa, which is almost impossible to obtain; and finally Israel sets very strict conditions on the entry of Palestinians, although many of those stranded on the border have families living in Gaza," the statement said.

An EOHR representative visited the area on 15 January and found that the expelled Palestinians were living in 40 tents put up by the Libyan authorities. The Palestinians reported that the Libyan authorities no longer provided them with food, medicine or drinking water, but the EOHR report described weather conditions as an even worse problem: "The day the EOHR was there, a strong storm and heavy rains hit the area,

blowing away tents and damaging the residents' scant belongings. Residents said temperatures fall to below zero at night and they have no source of heating."

Camp dwellers have no running water, toilets or shower facilities. According to the statement, "those who can afford the money pay one Libyan dinar (LE1) to take a shower in a nearby coffee shop at the Libyan town of Musaid". Because of the cold weather, many of the camp's children suffer from skin complaints and chest problems.

"Feeling that these Palestinians are being ignored by the whole world, the EOHR appeals to President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amr Moubarak to seriously consider the cases of those Palestinians, especially those married to Egyptian women, and to allow them entry," the statement urged.

"We hope that the Egyptian authorities will consider moving those who have Egyptian travel documents to Camp Canada at Rafah on the Egypt-Gaza border, where weather conditions are much better. This would also make it easier for their families to visit them." For those without Egyptian travel documents, the EOHR urged the Libyan authorities to allow resettlement in Libya and to provide jobs. It also urged the Palestinian National Authority to attempt to secure the return of the deportees to Gaza. "We particularly appeal to the Palestinian National Authority to put all the pressure it can on the Israeli authorities to allow the entry of Palestinians stranded on the Libyan border who are willing to return to Gaza."

The organisation said it would send a second fact-finding mission to the border to prepare a more detailed report. Warning that the situation could turn into a human catastrophe unless an immediate solution was found, the EOHR said it would send the Palestinians some emergency supplies and urged other relief organisations to make donations.

AH

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

Money trouble at the Bar

Around 50 lawyers, mostly Islamists, filed lawsuits on Monday contesting a decision by the Abdin Court of First Instance, which wrested control of the Bar Association from the Muslim Brotherhood and placed the organisation under judicial sequestration.

The court's decision, announced on Sunday, was in response to a lawsuit filed nearly 10 months ago by 14 anti-Brotherhood lawyers, who alleged financial irregularities by the syndicate's Islamist-controlled council. The petitioners also claimed that an internal split in the council was damaging the syndicate.

Before appealing to the court, one of the 14 plaintiffs had submitted two complaints to the prosecutor-general, accusing the Bar Association's council of financial malpractices. These complaints are still under investigation by the Public Money Prosecution department.

The court's judgement acknowledged the existence of a serious conflict among the council's members. It also cited a report by the Central Auditing Agency showing that large sums of Bar Associa-

A Cairo court has put the Islamist-dominated Bar Association under judicial sequestration, on grounds of financial malpractice. But Islamist lawyers are contesting the order. Mona El-Nahhas reports

tion money had been mispent, and that the syndicate's own auditing body had not applied relevant financial regulations. No record had been kept of money allocated to pilgrimages, and the syndicate's final budgets for the years 1989 to 1995 had not been submitted to the agency.

In view of these findings, the court decided the Bar Association's money was not safe in the hands of the association's ruling council and imposed judicial control on the organisation until the disputing sides were able to reach a settlement.

The court appointed three custodians to take over the running of syndicate affairs. They are Ahmed El-Khawaga, the Bar Association's chairman, Hassan El-Mahdi, chairman of the syndicate's Gaza branch, and Selim El-Awwa, a prominent Islamist lawyer. The choice of the latter, it was said, was made with the aim of placating

the Islamists. The custodians will form a committee to take over the syndicate's accounts, and will send three-monthly reports to the court listing revenues and expenses.

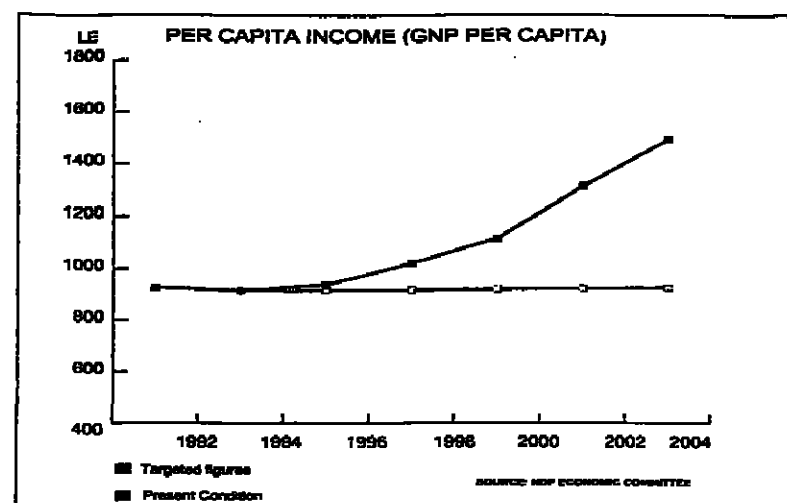
Although the court order was scheduled to take effect from Monday, the counter-lawsuits filed by the Islamist lawyers suspended its implementation. In the view of Sabri Mubadda, an anti-Islamist council member representing the plaintiffs, the court's verdict is final and unassailable. "Sequestration is the only means of stopping money draining out of the syndicate", he asserted, adding that "any delay in implementing the verdict will only threaten the lawyers' interests".

But in the opinion of Selim El-Awwa, the court's verdict is "legally unsound", because syndicate funds are considered public money which cannot be placed under sequestration. However, he conceded:

مركز أمن الإسلام

Ganzouri goes for growth

Egypt's new prime minister speaks of self-sufficiency, protecting water resources and boosting industrial growth. Gamal Essam El-Din listens in at the People's Assembly



Launching the annual marathon of parliamentary debates, Egyptian Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri last Saturday reviewed his government's strategy for the country's various economic sectors.

Addressing the newly-elected parliament, El-Ganzouri declared that the main objective of the new government is to be self-sufficient in most agricultural crop production by raising the annual agricultural growth rate to 3.5 per cent. This, however, does not include wheat, on which El-Ganzouri said the government aims "to raise self-sufficiency to 70 per cent". El-Ganzouri also noted the government's special emphasis on promoting agricultural exports, especially non-traditional ones, by modernising cultivation techniques and raising the productivity rates of crops.

According to the Prime Minister, the most important agricultural projects for the next few years include raising production of grain crops to 18 million tonnes per year; increasing cotton production to recover Egypt's export share of international markets; and raising production of different sources of animal protein to maintain the present self-sufficiency rate of red meat (63 per cent) and dairy and poultry production (72 per cent).

To reach these goals, land reclamation will continue to play an essential role. In fact, El-Ganzouri said the government has already laid down the infrastructure to cultivate 280,000 feddans of reclaimable land.

He also emphasised the pressing need to rationalise the use of water resources in Egypt, protect water supplies from pollution and recycle drainage water. He said, government projects in this sector include developing new water resources, estimated at 1.5 billion cubic metres a year, to cultivate an area of 1.6 million feddans by the year 2000; establishing the New Valley canal to create new rural communities in an area of 300,000 - 500,000 feddans; and building or renovating around 93 irrigation stations all over Egypt.

The government also plans to deal with the industrial sector on two levels — by raising the rate of industrial growth to 10 per cent annually and tripling current industrial exports. El-Ganzouri said this year the government will start establishing six giant industrial complexes in Assiut, Sohag, Qena, the New Valley, Ismailia, and Dakahlia along with two other complexes, one for leather and tanning works in Badri city and the other for plumbing works in Qattania (South Cairo).

Other industrial projects planned for this year include operating the new phosphate production project

in Abou Tartur, in the New Valley, to produce 2.2 million tonnes of phosphate per year, and operating the first production line of Maghara coal mines in Sinai to produce 600,000 tonnes of coal per year.

El-Ganzouri also mentioned government plans to supply electricity to all of Egypt's small villages in the next few years. It will also encourage foreign and local businessmen to invest in electrical projects.

The most important projects planned, El-Ganzouri stated, include raising the generating capacity of Egypt's electricity grid to 4,000 megawatts by the year 2002 and linking distant areas to the national grid. He also said that the new government will promote the local production of electrical requisites and equipment and power generation stations.

Moving on to the oil sector, El-Ganzouri said that the government will continue exploring for new oil and natural gas fields and upgrading the Egyptian petrochemicals industry.

In the area of transport, El-Ganzouri said the government plans to raise the capacity of the existing railway tracks and the efficiency of alluvial transport, deepen the Suez Canal to allow the passage of cargo ships of more than 300,000 tonnes, complete a new underground metro line between Shubra and Ramses Square and on to Tahrir, provide 540,000 new telephone lines, and build a new airport in Nagab, Sinai.

Regarding tourism, El-Ganzouri said the government will exert all efforts to attract 5.8 million tourists annually, with a target profit goal of \$5.3 billion.

Emphasising trade, finance and banking sectors, the government plans to stimulate internal and external trade by creating specialised marketing companies, establishing a number of new free-zone areas, raising the efficiency of the securities market, achieving monetary stability, and speeding up the privatisation process.

The new government also promised to build 1.5 million housing units in the new five-year plan, provide low-cost housing to limited-income citizens and implement the "Mubarak project for housing youth".

Wrapping up his policy statement, El-Ganzouri pointed out that working towards the 21st century, the government will implement a national rural development project and three other national projects for the development of Sinai, Upper Egypt, and the New Valley.

Supplementing El-Ganzouri's policy statement, Nawal El-Tatawi, the new minister of economy and international cooperation, told the assembly's economic committee last Sunday that boosting investment in Egypt is a top priority. She said her first impression is that although there is a pressing need to solve a lot of administrative obstacles that still hinder investment, investment incentives in Egypt are quite considerable and rather in need of "fine tuning".

El-Tatawi said that she is currently conducting an "overall evaluation" of the economic policies and "existing potentials" to boost investment rates.

El-Tatawi also stressed the importance of changing Egypt's relationship with other countries from a donor-recipient relationship to one that is based on partnership. The minister said such partnerships would facilitate the transfer of technology and the opening of new markets.

El-Tatawi also said that her ministry must coordinate with the ministries of supply, foreign trade and scientific research in order to find a solution to the problems facing exporters, streamline the quality of export-oriented products and raise productivity.

She also said she will focus on raising saving rates and remittances from Egyptian workers abroad while reducing imports in an attempt to reduce the deficit in the balance of trade. In terms of international cooperation, El-Tatawi also indicated that she is planning to map out the grants, loans and donations provided to Egypt. "I will try my best to maximise the number of grants and soft-term loans as a better option to investors than borrowing from banks," El-Tatawi said.

Five main tasks

SPEAKING before the People's Assembly this week, Minister of Supply Ahmed El-Guwely outlined the five main tasks which lie ahead for his ministry. The minister promised to provide citizens with their basic food needs, rationalise subsidies within the framework of the economic reform programme, improve the balance of trade, regulate internal trade, and put a stop to consumer fraud.

To meet the basic food needs of the Egyptian population, El-Guwely intends to raise the local production of such basic food commodities as wheat and sugar.

The ministry will also produce a new kind of bread mixed with maize. El-Guwely stated his ministry is currently creating a strategic stock of sugar to offset any price rises or shortage crises.

He indicated his ministry will only subsidise bread and food ration cards. El-Guwely said bread subsidies rose from LE1500 million in 1994 to

LE2000 million in 1995, due to the rise in the international price of wheat, and the government will try its best to maintain this level. As for ration cards, he said the ministry is presently reducing their number by excluding recipients "found to be ineligible to receive these cards".

El-Guwely also said that one of the main targets of his ministry is to reduce the deficit in the balance of trade by increasing exports. He said his ministry is presently co-ordinating with exporters and the Ministry of Industry to strengthen Egypt's competitive edge in foreign markets. "Egyptian exports cover only 35 per cent of Egyptian imports," El-Guwely said, adding that "and even the bulk of these exports is oil and some other volatile and marginal items."

In terms of domestic trade, El-Guwely said once the consumer cooperatives are returned to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Supply, the financial conditions in these companies will be adjusted.

However, he pointed out that unlike the past, goods sold by these cooperatives will not be subsidised but will be sold at reasonable prices.

The government is in the process of submitting legislation on domestic trade to the People's Assembly, according to the minister. These include the chambers of commerce law, the intellectual property rights law, the trade marks law, the trade registration law, and the patents law.

El-Guwely emphasised that as the Egyptian economy is moving towards a full-fledged market economy, there will be a pressing need to protect consumers against commercial fraud and monopolistic practices. "While the Assembly passed a law on commercial fraud last year, this year a new anti-trust law will be submitted to the assembly with the objective of protecting consumers and producers alike," El-Guwely said.

A taxing predicament

Thousands of Egyptians who had lined up in front of the General Department of Taxes on Wages and Salaries of Expatriates (GDTWSE) last week were appalled to discover that they did not qualify for the promised expatriate tax refund.

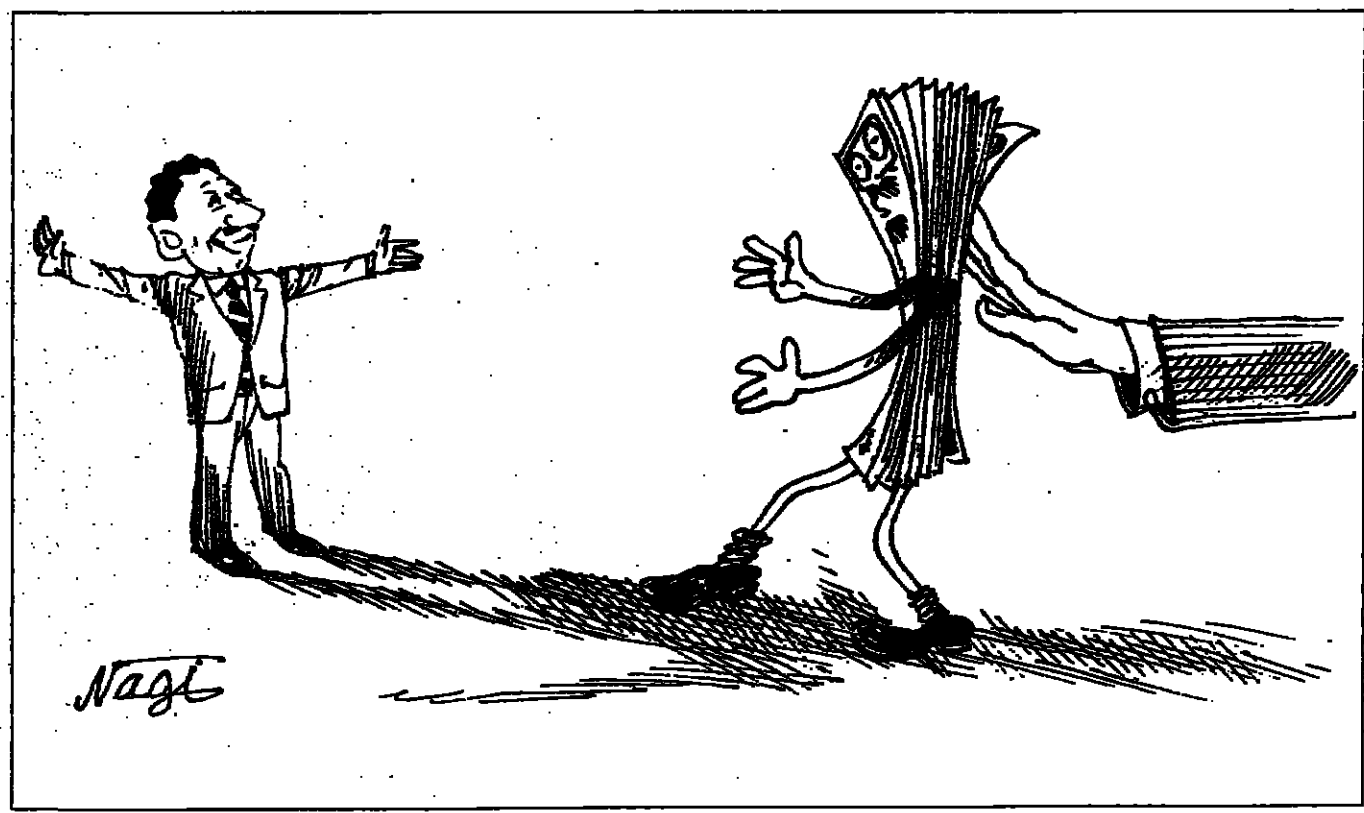
The problem stems from a cabinet decree issued two weeks ago which stated that expatriate taxes levied on Egyptians working abroad would be refunded immediately in three annual instalments. The tax was collected under Law 229 of 1989, a law which was later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Constitutional Court, forcing the Tax Authority to return the money collected.

While some 220,000 citizens stand to recoup their money as a result of the new ministerial decree and have gone to the tax office to fill out applications, thousands of others, to their surprise, will remain unaffected since the refund is not applicable to expatriate taxes collected under Law 208 of 1994. This law, which is more comprehensive than Law 229, was not annulled by the ministerial decree. The 1994 law imposes an expatriate tax on the salaries and other wages of Egyptians working abroad. It allows for five per cent deduction for single individuals, and 10 per cent for married couples, and is divided into several income brackets. A one per cent tax is levied on incomes under LE20,000, two per cent is charged on earnings between LE20,000 and LE40,000 while a three per cent tax is collected from those earning more than LE40,000 per year. According to the law, only those employed by the private or public sectors are liable for taxation. Entrepreneurs are exempt.

Law 229, said Osama Abdel-Sadeq, chairman of the Tax Authority, was issued in 1989 to collect taxes from Egyptian expatriates who had worked in the governmental sector prior to their departure.

"However, in December 1993, the Supreme Constitutional Court ruled

A recent ministerial decree pledges a tax refund for Egyptian expatriates but, as some found out, the fine print will leave them out in the cold, writes Mona El-Fiqi



that the law [229] was unconstitutional since it imposed the tax on a specific group of citizens — in this case, government employees," he explained, adding that other groups were exempted.

"In all, LE300 million was collected by the Tax Authority during the four years the law was on the books," Abdel-Sadeq noted.

But the government, he said, should have begun repaying the money

once the law was struck down in 1993. A cash flow problem, however, prevented this from happening.

Following the issuing of the decree, the authority will now refund the money in three instalments, with only those due to receive refunds of up to LE500 being paid in one lump sum. Apart from those already filing applications for refunds, added Abdel-Sadeq, other taxpayers who had filed lawsuits against the Tax Authority following the annulment of Law 229 in 1993 will have to wait until their case is decided before collecting their funds.

For many disgruntled expatriates the ministerial decree has been too late in coming. Safaa Ahmed, an employee at the Ministry of Education, who paid about LE3,000 in taxes over a three-year period, stated that the tax was unfair as the amount collected was based on the taxpayer's profession in Egypt, and did not take into account the position they held overseas. Other expatriates such as Sayed Abdel-Fattah, however, were more willing to let bygones be bygones. "I didn't expect that the government would give us back any money at all," he said.

While it seems to be a matter of time before those who qualify for refunds will receive them, expatriates who did not fall into this category continue to submit applications for reimbursement. Mohamed Abdel-Moneim, head of the expatriates' department at the Tax Authority, said that approximately 1,300 expatriates come to the department daily to fill in applications for refunds. Of these individuals, he said, roughly 30 per cent paid taxes under Law 208 of 1994 and thus do not qualify for a reimbursement.

Abdel-Moneim also explained that each person who qualifies for a refund and who has filled out an application, will receive a check within 10 days. They will also be informed through the mail of the disbursement dates for the second and third instalments.

Shares for sale

NEXT MAY the Holding Company for Food Industries plans to offer 10 per cent of the shares of its subsidiary North Cairo Mills (NCM) for public subscription. The new issue, which comprises 600,000 shares, will be offered through the stock market. A maximum of 500 shares will be allowed for each investor.

The planned offering will raise the percentage of NCM shares sold to 30 per cent. The Holding Company for Food Industries, which was previously the sole owner of NCM, sold 20 per cent of its shares last June. Today the company owns 80 per cent, its Employee Shareholders' Association and workers own 10 per cent, while the remaining 10 per cent is owned by banks and mutual funds.

Hussein Shahin, head of the financial department at NCM, said his company posted a LE61.5 million profit during the first half of the 1995-1996 fiscal year. He explained that the announcement of this figure pushed the value of the share to LE90 at the beginning of this week compared to LE74 the previous week.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

Market report

Manufacturing keeps sliding

FOLLOWING last week's recovery, the GMI once again suffered a relapse, losing 0.73 points to close at 210.6 for the week ending 25 January. The volume of trading, however, increased by about 20 per cent over the previous week, reaching LE61.18 million.

The manufacturing sector, again, suffered the biggest losses, its index falling by 1.73 points to close at 276.2 as a result of declining share values of 16 companies. In trading action, three cement companies, the Alexandria Cement Company, the Ameria Cement Company and the Tora Cement Company, reeled from share value decreases. Alexandria Cement's shares fell by LE16.75 per share to close at LE330 while those of Ameria and Tora lost LE4 and LE0.21 respectively to level off at LE45.5 and LE48.2.

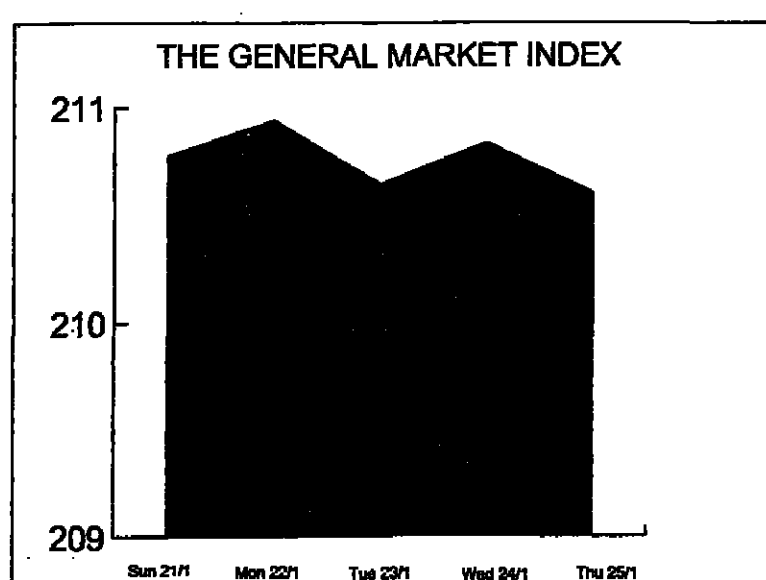
Breaking free from the pack, other companies fared better. Egypt Aluminium Products Company gained an impressive LE165

per share, a 122 per cent increase, to close at LE300. North Cairo Mills Company gained LE2 per share to close at LE74. In other trading, Helwan Portland Cement led the market in terms of value and volume of transactions. With 150,200 of its shares exchanging hands for LE5.38 million, trading of the company's shares accounted for 31.47 per cent of total market transactions.

Along with the manufacturing sector, the financial sector continued to slide, its index losing 2.48 points to close at 219.89. Commercial International Bank (CIB) shares lost LE19 per share to close at LE465 while those of Misr International Bank (MIB) plummeted by LE13.25 to close at LE251.75 per share.

Making it a clean sweep for losing sectors, the service sector's index fell by 0.32 points to level off at 137.15.

In all, the shares of 16 companies increased in value, 23 decreased and 15 remained unchanged.



The UN's changing face

Amid criticism of its shortcomings, the UN recently sought to redefine its role in a changing world order, writes Walid Abdel-Nasser

Behind the scenes at the UN's 50th anniversary last year, world leaders and delegates took time away from photo opportunities and keynote speeches to discuss the changes that need to be implemented in this international body. What emerged from these discussions was the realisation that its present and future role must be injected with a measure of dynamism and new momentum. Among the main areas targeted for re-orientation is international economic relations, particularly where developing countries of the south are concerned.

The emphasis of the UN's new orientation is on providing basic social services, including medical and educational services, particularly to low-income sectors of the world's population. A number of international organisations affiliated with the UN, such as the UN Fund for Population Activities, the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the UN Fund for Women, are all actively engaged in this sphere.

The second dimension to this new role focuses on creating income-generating opportunities to help the poor acquire full employment and a sustainable means of living. UN organisations like the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development are all potential contributors.

In addition, there is the question of creating a congenial environment for sustainable development. We refer here to issues related to macroeconomic policies, including foreign debt, development finance, access to advanced or appropriate technology, challenges of good management and governance, and social development.

In an attempt to consolidate its relations with the Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)), the UNDP acknowledged the leading role of these institutions in addressing macroeconomic policies in conjunction with various other technical assistance agencies. The UN will also have to take into account the resolutions passed in the 1995 Copenhagen Social Summit, and the Beijing Women's Conference of the same year, in the process of readjusting its activities in the area of international economic and social relations.

Some international observers see the UN's new orientation as focusing on consciousness-building for expanding international economic relations. It is believed that the UN will endeavour to implement agreements regarding plans of action at country levels and to monitor the actual implementation of those plans.

The accumulation of resolutions from past international conferences has been instrumental in prompting the UN to re-examine its activities. In these conferences, certain targets were identified and international organisations, particularly specialised agencies such as the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO, were entrusted with the task of following up on their implementation and assisting countries in that process.

Here, we refer specifically to the priority given, over recent years, to alleviating poverty. This requires an environment favourable to securing employment opportunities and sustainable means of living without exhausting natural resources. Priority is also now given to providing basic social services to the poor, with special emphasis on women.

In addition, the UN is keen to support developmental strategies at country levels to encourage governments outlining their development strategies to take into consideration their countries' specific circumstances, needs and socio-economic objectives.

Past experience proves that no international or regional organisation is capable of single-handedly helping governments, especially those of the Third World, solve all their problems. This task requires joint action and coordination among various UN bodies, the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO.

Admittedly, in the past there were differences in orientation, strategies and policies between UN organisations — particularly those concerned with social and economic development — and Bretton Woods institutions and GATT (WTO's predecessor), particularly in the case of Third World countries. In recent times, however, extensive dialogue and contacts have generated a mechanism to settle differences.

Moreover, global developments led to a shrinking of the socialist camp and a quasi-victory for Western free market ideology which include, competition, private enterprise, individual incentives, entrepreneurship, trade liberalisation, financial markets, foreign exchange, and supply and demand. These changes influenced the policies of the UN bodies concerned with international economic relations and brought them closer to free market values, thereby bridging the gap between the UN on the one hand, and the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO on the other.

Coordination among these different organisations is beneficial due to other reasons. First, there are insufficient resources to support international development at the multilateral level, whether from donors or from those resources channelled through the UN and other international organisations. Second, it is necessary to ensure that the different organisations complement each other, leading to institutionalisation, clearly defined roles and division of labour.

More importantly, all countries, particularly major economic and trading powers, are required to back the UN's new orientation through political and financial support. This would offset the international community's failure, since the sixties, to sufficiently support UN strategies for development.

The writer has served as spokesman for the Group of 77 and the African Group in Geneva on trade, services and transfer of technology from 1989-1992.

Fuel for food

Next Tuesday United Nations and Iraqi negotiators will be taking part in talks on an oil-for-food scheme. Rasha Saad reports

Iraqi and United Nations representatives will discuss on Tuesday a plan adopted by the Security Council last April to allow Iraq to sell \$2 billion worth of oil every six months. UN Resolution 986 will enable Iraq to buy food, medicine and other necessities, though it will not affect other sanctions imposed after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. Fighting in the air was heard in the capital Baghdad as ordinary Iraqis hailed the news as a promise of release from their present ordeal. The ruling Baath Party newspaper depicted the negotiations as the "beginning of the end for the embargo."

The possibility of Iraq selling oil again has also boosted the value of the Iraqi currency. According to reports there is a possibility of a further surge in the value of the dinar which is currently trading at around 1,000 dinars to the dollar, compared with 3,000 earlier this month.

Despite such optimism, the outcome of negotiations between both sides is still difficult to anticipate. A UN spokeswoman described the talks as "incredibly difficult" and not easy to solve.

Iraq has criticised UN Resolution 986 since it was first passed. But Security Council members have made clear the terms of the resolution cannot be changed during the course of the talks.

According to Nabil Nejm, the Iraqi ambassador to Egypt, Iraq regards the resolution, in its present form, as threatening the sovereignty and integrity of the country.

But he said that the main aim behind the proposed meetings with UN representatives is to "try to reach a formula that guarantees the flow of [Iraqi] oil in return for humanitarian necessities."

Iraqi objections to the resolution centre on two points. Firstly, part of the revenues will be allocated directly to northern (Kurdish) areas, which are beyond the control of Baghdad. According to Nejm, this is an implicit recognition of the territorial division of Iraq, and a de facto Kurdish state. He also said that his country does not want to be restricted to using Turkish pipelines to export its oil. Nejm held that the success of the talks beginning on Tuesday will depend on the ability of the UN to understand and consider these points.

Salah Al-Shekhali, spokesman of the London-based umbrella opposition front, the Iraqi National Congress, does not believe that Iraq will apply the resolution anyway, regardless of the concessions the UN may make.

He believes that Saddam Hussein accepted talks

on partial oil sales to gain international sympathy and to show that he is willing to help his people out of their suffering, especially after the negative report by the special investigator appointed by the UN human rights commission in Geneva, which criticised Iraq for refusing to alleviate the plight of its people through Resolution 986.

In a recent speech, Saddam Hussein said that the Jordanian decision to cut its exports to Iraq in half was behind his government's agreement to hold talks. He said that Iraq does not want to depend on Jordan as its only outlet.

Jordan was the strongest supporter of Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War, much to the displeasure of Arab Gulf countries. However, the official Jordanian attitude has changed recently with the kingdom realigning ties with some Gulf countries, providing refuge to two top officials who defected from Iraq, holding meetings with the Iraqi opposition and calling for the downfall of the regime.

The Iraqi decision to enter the talks came amidst reports of political reforms taken in Iraq. Last week, Saddam Hussein called for parliamentary elections to be held next March in line with the "democratic reforms" that he pledged following his victory in the presidential referendum last October.

Moreover, the Iraqi justice minister, Shabib Al-Malki, announced that Iraq has abolished some of its allegedly Islamic *Shari'a*-style punishments, such as the severing of ears, branding of foreheads and amputation of limbs.

Commenting on such changes, Salah Al-Mokhtar, editor-in-chief of the Iraqi *Junhuriyyah* newspaper, told the *Weekly* that these latest moves signified a development in democracy.

"The Iraqi regime decided not to let the US-led economic siege obstruct the development of democracy any longer," he said.

Al-Mokhtar argued that the US does not want democracy to prevail because it will enable the Iraqi people to fight US hegemonic designs over their country and its oil resources. He accused the US of supporting the Iraqi opposition which he charged is against democracy, in order to divide Iraq.

For ordinary Iraqis, the success of the oil-for-food deal will be measured by its impact on bleak health statistics. Earlier this month, the International Red Cross described the humanitarian situation in Iraq as disastrous, and reported a five-fold increase in infant mortality since the second Gulf war. It was also reported that 4 million of Iraq's 20 million people face starvation and that the level of malnutrition is on a par with famine-ravaged countries.



A royal friend for Iraqi opposition

Recent Jordanian contacts with the Iraqi opposition have been hailed as another blow to Saddam Hussein, but how big a blow? Doaa El-Bey in London listens in on the debate

It was not until late last year that King Hussein of Jordan declared before the media that he would open the channels of dialogue with the Iraqi opposition in London. His aim was to help unite their ranks and find a way out of Iraq's current crisis. Contacts between Jordan and the Iraqi opposition had, in fact, started a few months earlier, but were kept behind closed doors.

King Hussein's efforts were crowned last month by the holding of a two-day symposium on "Iraqi aggression against Kuwait" in Amman. The symposium, attended by a number of Iraqi politicians and Iraqi and other Arab intellectuals took place only a few weeks after King Hussein sent his special envoy Mohamed Ali to London to meet several Iraqi opposition groups.

Jordan's initiative came as a surprise to some Arab states, and an even greater shock to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Several Arab states, particularly Syria, think that the Jordanian monarch has gone too far by mentioning the establishment of a federal state in Iraq as an option for resolving the crisis.

As for Saddam, he has always regarded Jordan as an ally. Jordan was one of the few Arab states that refused to join the US-led allied coalition against Iraq during the second Gulf War. King Hussein's recent move will only increase Iraqi isolation.

The monarch's stance towards Iraq has changed since he gave refuge to Saddam's son-in-law Hussein Kamel last year. There was speculation then that Kamel could lead the Iraqi opposition movement against the current regime from Amman. Next door to Iraq, Jordan could provide a much more effective base for the opposition than its present location in Europe.

Iraqi opposition figures have welcomed Jordan's initiative as a positive change, though there are doubts over whether it can succeed in resolving the crisis. Poland Al-Haidari, an Iraqi poet living in London who attended the Amman symposium, said that the role of Jordan is an "informational" one that aims to reveal to the world "the dangers of what is going on inside Iraq now."

By holding this meeting, he added, Jordan wanted to offer an opportunity for Iraqis, Kuwaitis and other Arab intellectuals to talk about "the cultural crisis in Iraq and the Arab silence towards it."

He dismissed charges that King Hussein advocated a federal union as a possible solution. "[King Hussein] was once asked about it, and he said the Iraqi people are the only party able to decide the shape of the government they want. He and Crown Prince Hassan said more than once that it is not in the interest of the region to divide Iraq."

Although Al-Haidari did not seem very optimistic

that Jordan's initiative can resolve the Iraqi crisis, he believes that intellectuals "whether Iraqi or Arab" should play their role because "the political parties have failed so far to play an active and fruitful role."

Al-Haidari added, "There is a plan to hold another meeting attended by five Iraqi opposition figures and five Kuwaitis to have talks on a deeper level. It may be held in Amman, but a date is not yet fixed."

Saad Abdul-Razak, an independent Iraqi politician who attended the Amman symposium, agreed with Al-Haidari that it is possible to hold further meetings, but he felt they are not likely to bear any fruit in the near future.

Jordan's initiative to open a dialogue with the Iraqi opposition represents, according to him, a complete change in Amman's stand. "For the first time, Jordan is openly calling for a change of the regime in Iraq, as the longer it stays in power the more the Iraqi people will suffer," he said.

The Amman symposium shows that Jordan is welcoming the Iraqi opposition within its borders, and is giving it the chance to talk to the media in Jordan, he added. "It is also calling on internal political institutions such as the army and Al-Baath Party to play a more active political role for a change."

Abdul-Razak dismissed the idea of a federal union or any other form of division as an option for re-

solving the current crisis. "The people can decide for themselves, and elect the body that will govern them in the future. King Hussein suggested a federal union at the beginning, but he openly declared later that he would withdraw this suggestion for as long as it is against the interests of the Iraqi people," he said.

Leith Kobba, of the Islamic Imam Khawqi Institution, who attended the symposium and met Ali in London and King Hussein in Jordan, hailed the Jordanian initiative. "It came from King Hussein, not from the government or the embassy in London, and that gives it enough weight," he said.

He added that at the heart of this initiative is the holding of a meeting where all Iraqi opposition parties would be represented. In this meeting, due to be held in Amman, they hope to agree on a united vision for change in Iraq, Jordan, he believes, will help them to reach this goal.

The purpose behind sending the Jordanian envoy, holding a symposium and opening further channels of dialogue is "to reach this one vision, ahead of fixing a date for that meeting," he predicted that meetings will continue between Jordanians and the Iraqi opposition "but away from

the prying eye of the media."

Kobba blessed all efforts to save Iraq from division. "There is rising concern about the northern (Kurdish) part of Iraq which is not under the sovereignty of the Iraqi state." He fears that this separation will become a de facto division of the country. The sooner the opposition acts to change the regime, he concluded, the better for Iraq. "Jordan's initiative may be good, as I have always heard King Hussein warning about the dangers of dividing Iraq," he added cautiously.

The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) spokesman, who talked on condition of anonymity, hailed the initiative, but disagreed with Kobba on the dangers of dividing Iraq. "Any plan for change that will give the Kurds their legitimate rights is welcome. The Kurds chose the federal union which was included in King Hussein's initiative. That is why we feel that it will meet our needs and own right of self-determination," he said.

However, time will tell whether King Hussein will succeed or be stalled by a fragmented Iraqi opposition whose internal divisions have prevented it from playing an effective role for more than four years.

Underclass in revolt

Widespread unrest continued this week across Bahrain but the government insists the situation is under control, Khaled Dawoud reports

World governments, led by the United States and members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), reiterated their support this week for the Bahraini government and condemned the outbreaks of violence allegedly incited by opposition elements loyal to Iran.

Meanwhile, last week's threat by the Bahraini army command to impose martial law if riots continued has apparently faded as police managed to gain control of the situation.

"The Bahraini Interior Ministry" announced earlier this week it was referring 180 people to trial for taking part in riots and committing acts of arson against property, public buildings, power stations, buses and private cars. It announced that a total of 400 people were being held for participating in acts of violence which broke out at the beginning of January.

The riots followed several opposition meetings, led by Sheikh Abdul-Amir Al-Jamri, in mosques during which demands for the restoration of parliament and release of Bahrainis held in prison since the protests of January last year were renewed. The government responded by closing down the mosques and later arrested Jamri and many of his associates.

The Emir of Bahrain, Sheikh Eissa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, whose Sunni family has been ruling the Gulf island since the late 18th century, dissolved the short-lived parliament in 1975, only two years after its establishment. Opposition members inside the parliament had argued against a law which gave the emir the right to order the detention of any citizen seen as a threat to "national security". They had also opposed an agreement which allowed the United States to station its troops on the island and to use other smaller islands as bases for its airforce deployed in the Gulf region.

A statement by the London-based opposition group, the Bahrain Freedom Movement led by Jamri's son, Mansour, said that the number of those arrested in recent riots had reached 2,000. But, the government denies this figure.

Meanwhile, pro-government newspapers in Bahrain continued to hold Iran responsible for the renewed wave of unrest which was concentrated in Shi'ite Muslim villages around the Bahraini capital, Manama. Shi'ites make up the majority of Bahrain's 500,000 strong indigenous population. With the exception of an elite of wealthy merchants and contractors, the Shi'ites are generally less prosperous than Bahrainis who belong to Islam's mainstream Sunni sect.

But Mansour told the *Weekly*, in a telephone interview from London, that opposition demands had no connection to any religious sect.

"Our demands are democratic. We have nothing to do with being Sunni or Shi'ite," he said. "We want the restoration of parliament and the release of thousands of people illegally held in prison for months. What does this have to do with religion?" he added.

Mansour, whose group has been pro-

ducing daily statements on incidents of protest in Bahrain, listed names of several Sunni figures who have sided with the opposition and who were also suppressed by the government.

He denied any link with Iran, saying the government has been using this claim to crush the opposition and to gain the sympathy of other countries, especially the United States and Saudi Arabia.

The opposition leader justified the recent wave of unrest by the government's delay in meeting opposition demands despite earlier promises to settle differences.

He admitted that the opposition was involved in negotiations with the government, "but there was no progress in our demand for the release of all prisoners as the government did not want to be seen as bowing down to pressure from the opposition."

"Given that the prisoners were not released, my father Sheikh Abdul-Amir and his colleagues had to speak out and inform the public of what was taking place. The Interior Ministry told my father in closed meetings that they did not mind him criticising the government, but they opposed getting the public involved," Mansour said.

He added that the only evidence the government can offer in support of its allegations of an Iranian hand in the unrest is that the unrest was being prominently reported by Tehran Radio. "The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reports daily on what happens in Bahrain. Why are we not being accused of working as agents for the British? We have no relation with Iran whatsoever," he said.

Mansour admitted that protesters took part in riots in which private property was burned, "but those were only limited incidents and they were carried out by angry youth. We have told the government several times we do not want any violence. But they leave those young men no choice. The government is telling them that they have to give up their demands or they will be suppressed violently."

Though the riots are on a greater scale than the protests last year, there are no reports so far of any people getting killed. Eleven citizens and three policemen were killed in last year's clashes.

Although the United States strongly condemned the protesters' violence, the statement issued by the State Department conceded there might be economic and political reasons behind these latest incidents. It called upon the Bahraini government to consider these matters.

Despite being one of the six rich GCC members, Bahrain's limited oil resources are nearly exhausted and, in recent years, the country's income has been dependent on earnings from transit trade and its role as a business centre in the Gulf region. The increasing unemployment among the young generation in Bahrain, compared to the lavish lifestyle of the ruling elite, has also been cited as one of the reasons behind the latest riots.



A Palestinian man argues with an Israeli soldier after being arrested near the Israeli settlement of Kfar Darom in the autonomous Gaza Strip on suspicion that his gas bottle is loaded with explosives (photo: AFP)

Thirsting after Lebanon's waters

Israel is not in south Lebanon just for the sake of security or a better hand in negotiations on the Syrian track. Water, writes Zeina Khodr from Beirut, is no less vital

In the parched Middle East, water has always been considered strategically and economically vital. Lebanon is one of the few water-rich states in an area where water availability is gradually decreasing.

But with a growing population, rapid industrialisation and intensive agriculture, the government believes Lebanon will need all the water it can get. Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri told an international conference last summer that Lebanon is not prepared to give up any of its water. "We don't have water for sale," he said.

Israel disagrees and says that the Litani and Hasbani rivers in south Lebanon are under-utilised and could be used to increase Israel's reserves. The two rivers are only about 10 miles north of Israel's border and the so-called security zone Israel set up in the south grants it access to both rivers.

UN reports indicate that Israel has already laid pipelines to extract some of the water in the area it controls through its proxy militia, the South Lebanon Army, in clear breach of international law and the Geneva conventions.

It is not easy to be sure exactly what Israel has been doing in the area because of intermittent fighting and strict control, but reports by local farmers say Israel has built a tunnel to the Litani to the Hasbani thus diverting water. Politicians and

scientists alike are convinced that Israel's constant interest in Lebanon is related to water supplies as much as to worries about guerrillas on its borders.

The distribution of water in the region is one of the contentious issues being discussed at the Middle East multipilateral talks between Israel and its Arab neighbours. However, Lebanon and Syria have refused to attend the multilateral until progress is achieved in bilateral negotiations.

On the home front, Lebanon is in the process of rebuilding its water infrastructure after being bogged down in a protracted civil war. At present no area is exempt from water shortages due to problems of distribution. In some mountain villages, local residents are forced to purchase potable water. According to Faraj Al-Awar, professor at the Irrigation Department in the Agriculture School at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon is also in need of accurate weather data and information about river flows as such resources were destroyed during the civil war (1975-90).

While Lebanon has sufficient water to meet its current needs, some experts are concerned that there may not be enough

for the future. Bassam Jaber, the director-general at the Ministry of Electricity and Water Resources said, "The situation of water in Lebanon is very different from the one perceived abroad. There will be barely enough water resources in twenty years time." Jaber added that at such time Lebanon may have to resort to unconventional and costly techniques such as desalination.

Lebanon has no accurate statistics on water availability and needs, but estimates indicate there are approximately 8,600 million cubic metres (mcm) of available water per year. Less than a quarter of it can be collected, stored and used in a manner which is economically feasible. The rest, averaging about 6,000 mcm, is lost through non-beneficial evaporation, deep percolation to the ground water layer or run-off to the sea and neighbouring countries.

While it is not possible to retrieve most of this water, some may be salvageable, but at a high cost. "We may be able to utilise some of the water lost by building dams," for example. But at the present, plans to construct dams have been placed on the back burner since we do not have

the cash at hand," Jaber said.

Lebanon has approximately 40 rivers flowing into the Mediterranean Sea or neighbouring countries. Only 17 streams are perennial, and of these the Khabir River forms the northern border of Lebanon and Syria, the Orontes River flows into Syria and the Hasbani River flows into Israel. Water flowing into Syria (via the Orontes and Khabir rivers) amounts to about 510 mcm, and 16mcm is lost to Israel (via the Hasbani and Wazani rivers). The water flowing into these neighbouring countries cannot be recovered.

Apart from the rivers, Lebanon's main water source is rain. However, this is not without its problems. "The first is an uneven spatial distribution of water that is not matched by demand and the second is an uneven distribution in terms of time," Jaber said. There is only a relatively short period of precipitation each year — usually for 80 days — during which most of the water flows out to sea, while the need for water is constant and peaks during the dry period.

What is needed, says Al-Awar, is a strategy for controlling and planning this resource. "Without any master plan, we will not be able to properly utilise available water and allocate it efficiently. Every state must have a water plan as this resource is, in practical terms, the lifeline of a country."

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

At distant Fez, in Morocco, Abdel Salam Al-Aini hung up the certificates that he obtained in 1874 from the Egyptian Khedival Medical School "establishing his credentials in the modern medical sciences as currently practiced."

To the east, in the mountains of Lebanon, the patriarch of the Maronite community opens a letter from the head of the Maronite community in Egypt, who writes, "With regard to the Qasr Al-Aini Medical School, there are no vacant places available. Nor will there be a vacancy before six years, because His Royal Highness ordered that four of our denomination be enrolled this year, bringing the number of government sponsored students up to 25, among whom 15 are from our denomination and studying free of charge. Next year, there will be two places free, one of which shall go to the son of the late Sam'an Abu Haidar of our denomination and the other shall go to whomever fortune serves of the six individuals who pay their own fees."

The influence of the Qasr Al-Aini Medical School extended across the length and breadth of the Arab world. Established in 1838 by the French physician-historian, Clot Bey, it marked the transition from medieval to modern medical practice; from the herbalist's prescription to specialisation in treatment and surgery. Although, like the other higher institutes of learning established during Mohamed Ali's reign, Egypt's first modern medical school was initially established to serve the military, it proved to be the most adaptable to the successive radical changes Egyptian society underwent in the 19th century. Thus, under Mohamed Ali's grandson, the Khedive Ismail, it succeeded in making the transition from a military to a civilian academy, in contrast with the School for Engineering, for example, which was unable to keep pace with the corresponding change in society. Unlike engineering, it is difficult to classify the various branches of medicine and the various types of illnesses as military or civilian.

Qasr Al-Aini Medical School's particular status was bolstered by the fact that, even as its administration passed to Egyptian hands after Clot Bey's death, it retained its links with European medical institutions, particularly in France, Switzerland and Germany. Many graduates were sent abroad to complete their studies and many foreign physicians were brought to Egypt to teach at Qasr Al-Aini. *Al-Ahram* of the epoch confirms an extensive range of exchange. In an edition appearing in October 1887, we read, "After excelling in his medical education in Egypt, the eminent Doctor Iskander Rizqallah travelled to Paris to complete his studies, for which he has received full certification." Another item, appearing in 1891, tells us that Assad Effendi Samah, who had completed his studies at Qasr Al-Aini and "who spent 15 years in the government medical corps, travelled to Paris to study the various disciplines of ophthalmology." After four years abroad, Assad "received the highest certificates attesting to his skill

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In the 19th century, the influence of the Qasr Al-Aini Medical School extended across the length and breadth of the Arab world. Established in 1838 by the French physician/historian Clot Bey, it marked the transition from medieval to modern medical practice. In this instalment of his chronicle of modern Egyptian history as seen through the pages of *Al-Ahram*, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq looks at the efforts of the British occupiers to anglicise the school. By the end of the century, one school had been taken over completely by British teaching staff, so much so, that *Al-Ahram* then mourned what it called the "passing of the school"



and acumen and was consequently appointed to the Eye Clinic in Paris."

In addition to educational missions, Qasr Al-Aini officials would "travel to Europe to benefit from the developments in the practice of medicine in the academies there". Specifically, an *Al-Ahram* item announces that the Ministry of Education "has commissioned Dr Keating, deputy director of the medical school, to visit the bacteriology laboratories in England, France and Germany so that he can organise such a laboratory in the Egyptian medical school."

In the wake of the 1882 British occupation, the fact that Qasr Al-Aini managed to survive British policies aimed at discouraging higher learning is further testimony to the institute's success. Moreover, even with the dramatic rise in the influx of Europeans, it was able to withstand the competition by the many foreign practitioners who opened clinics in Egypt.

In fact, such was government concern for the continued welfare of the school, that it was subject to frequent visits by the Khedive. On 18 May 1885, *Al-Ahram* described one such state visit, during which "Abdel-Raziq Kamal performed an examination before the Khedive on the various internal illnesses and forensic medicine. He was followed by Ahmed Abdel-Aziz, who was examined in pharmacology and chemistry, and then by Zineb Razwan, who was examined in general arts and sciences, leaving the audience delighted at the progress the gentle sex is achieving in all fields of learning." Then the Khedive "inspected the large lecture halls, the scientific equipment and all the other medical facilities, after which he expressed his delight with everything he saw and he praised the school for its success since the appointment of the venerable Issa Pasha Hamdi, whom he asked to convey his great satisfaction to all the school's instructors."

On 25 March 1889 *Al-Ahram* records another visit to the institute by the Khedive, this time accompanied by the Minister of Education Ali Mubarak. The description enumerates the departments that were available at Qasr Al-Aini at the time. These included "the Arabic Studies Hall, the Hall for Diseases of the Eye, the Natural History Hall, the Department of Pharmacology, the Dissection Room and the Autopsy Room". On this occasion, too, the Khedive visited the hospital, "where

his good wishes to the patients were returned with their prayers to God on his behalf."

On the 5th anniversary of Qasr Al-Aini in 1888, the Khedive sent as his emissary his personal physician Salem Pasha Salem. In the speech he had prepared for the occasion, Salem praised "the directors and the instructors for their efforts in improving the state of instruction and education in accordance with the times so as to bring our school up to the standards of the higher institutes of medicine in Europe, from which we are still in great need of guidance". Encouraging the advancement of all branches of medicine, Salem stressed the need to keep abreast "of the many recent discoveries regarding the causes and prevention of diseases" and the importance of "relying on the modern sciences such as bacteriology, molecular biology, physiology, chemistry, anatomy and, last but not least, the art of diagnosis". The Khedive's representative concluded by wishing a bright future for Qasr Al-Aini as it enters its second half-century, although one wonders whether he could have predicted that his great grandchildren might well be students in that institution over a full century later.

From the contemporary *Al-Ahram*, we also learn a lot about the various people — students and staff — who contributed to the vitality of Qasr Al-Aini at various times in its history. Early on, it became an *Al-Ahram* tradition to publish the names of graduates from the school. To take 1895, for example, these included "Doctors Ibrahim Shukry, Mohamed Ali Al-Siki, Mohamed Sadeq Ahmed, Ahmed Othman and Abdel Hamid Ahmed." Many of the names of Qasr Al-Aini graduates would also appear on the society pages.

On one occasion, *Al-Ahram*'s Cairo correspondent expressed his gratitude for Qasr Al-Aini's teaching excellence. "Its students make outstanding progress, and I offer, by way of example, the names of the astute Hassan Effendi Asser who has treated me for a chest ailment. After a single dose of medication, following his examination and diagnosis, I am making a rapid recovery and I am nearly restored to my full health."

In June 1893, it was decided that the scope of the medical school should also extend to those "chemists who have no certificates and have never received training in a school of pharmacology". Ac-

cording to a law promulgated that year, uncertified pharmacists would have to sit exams set by Qasr Al-Aini's Pharmacology Faculty. In addition, they would have to "observe all the school's regulations regarding courses, administrative organisation and registration fees." In order to register, a candidate must be sponsored by a physician in the city where the pharmacist has his practice. He would also have to submit a certificate of "good moral standing". Once enrolled, a certain percentage of attendance was obligatory. Exemption could only be granted through a petition, submitted to the minister of education and signed by the dean of the faculty, showing "strong justification".

Matters were more difficult for veterinarians, who, as we learn from *Al-Ahram*, studied in a department associated with the school of agriculture. Veterinary training "lasted four years during which students have to observe the regulations of the medical school," reports *Al-Ahram*. Evidently, however, this training was not as successful as could be hoped.

In a lengthy letter to *Al-Ahram*, entitled "The Resurgence of Veterinarian Medicine," Ahmed Ashmawi, inspector of Veterinary Medicine in Giza and Qena, wrote, "Soon the Ministry of Education will enrol students in this branch of medicine in Qasr Al-Aini, due to the country's great need of trained veterinarians in the wake of the government's dismissal in 1885 of all veterinarians who had worked for the government." In fact, in 1893, an *Al-Ahram* report announced, "a bill to establish a department of veterinarian medicine in Qasr Al-Aini, soon to be followed by a department of dentistry."

As is the case with all expanding enterprises, more staff was needed. The following are samples of some advertisements that appeared in *Al-Ahram*:

"The Ministry of Education announces two vacancies in the medical school. The first is the position of lecturer in mental illnesses. The person who occupies this post is also required to serve as an assistant teacher of internal medicine, salary 17-22 pounds. The second position is as assistant teacher of surgery with a salary of 7-10 pounds. The advertisement, published in February 1895, also advised applicants that they would have to pass an oral examination "conducted in French", and that they were required to be completely proficient in French, German or

English. Well into the eighties, French continued to be the language of instruction in the institution established by Clot Bey. One would not expect this to continue, with the growing British influence under occupation. Indeed, the language of instruction became a subject of controversy in the following decade, as *Al-Ahram* would observe.

The British High Commissioner, Sir Evelyn Baring — later Lord Cromer — was responsible for writing a yearly report on the state of affairs in Egypt. In his 1891 report he wrote, "The standard of education in Qasr Al-Aini has improved somewhat with the engagement of a limited number of European professors of medicine. However, it is still far short of perfection. As for the administrative supervision, only one European employee. If there were more, the benefit would be considerable. However, the Egyptian ministry's aversion for engaging Europeans has hindered all progress on this front." With these words, Baring sounded the first shots in the battle to anglicise Qasr Al-Aini.

The first British appointments to the teaching staff aroused little comment. The newspaper simply announced that "two English doctors were appointed to the medical school, one as professor of internal medicine and the other as professor of ophthalmology." However, once the British began to infiltrate the administration, *Al-Ahram* could not contain its ire. On 23 December 1891 it proclaimed, "Efforts are under way to strip the administration of the medical school of every native born son and turn it over to Englishmen."

Al-Ahram's stance on this issue was consistent with its general opposition to British domination as a whole, as it was consistent with its support for French cultural pre-eminence, which *Al-Ahram* accused the British of trying to usurp.

After the death of Khedive Tawfik in January 1892, the British wasted little time in implementing their designs for Qasr Al-Aini. The fact that the Khedive died of a "bout of flu" which the palace physician, Salem Pasha Salem, was unable to cure came to their assistance. Egyptian doctors came under attack, and the first step was to replace the court physicians with British ones. The second step was to bring in a "British professor of anatomy" at Qasr Al-Aini. Responding to the announcement that this appointment would

only be temporary for one year, *Al-Ahram* scoffed, "That is only to quell our anxieties!"

Egyptian professors and *Al-Ahram* were not alone in resisting the British takeover of the medical school. The summer of 1894 demonstrated that students, too, could play an active role. Problems began when students submitted a petition to postpone the fifth grade exams scheduled for June 1894, to exempt them from fees and to arrange for payment of their stipends. While the students were waiting for a response, they received news of a meeting held under the chairmanship of Mr Dunlop, the Education Ministry's British adviser to change the statutes of the medical school. The students saw this as a British attempt to change Qasr Al-Aini's identity. In June 1894, the students occupied the building, bringing Fakhr Pasha the minister of education, personally to the scene to negotiate with them. Fakhr Pasha succeeded in his mission, but the occasion marks the first student sit-in in Egyptian history. And although the incident would be repeated in November 1898, it did not prevent the British from pursuing their policy of anglicising Qasr Al-Aini.

Several steps in rapid succession would tighten the British hold over the school. In May 1897, Ibrahim Pasha Hassan, director of the School of Medicine, was appointed director of the Health Authority. When his position at the school went to an Englishman, Mr Keating, *Al-Ahram* commented, "The principles and designs of English policy in Egypt are that the British assume the directorship of all administrative departments so that they can be the rulers."

As soon as he was appointed, Dr Keating instituted a new scheme or the school, which, according to *Al-Ahram*, was "to take the hospital away from the health authority so that Mr Keating can run it entirely by himself." Shortly afterwards, Mr Keating proved the Egyptians' worst fears justified. On 31 May 1898, *Al-Ahram* reports, "The Ministry of Education has distributed notice of the dismissal of the Egyptian members of staff at the School of Medicine. The exceptions were Ibrahim Pasha Hassan, who was designated honorary chief of the hospital, and Othman Bey Ghaleb, who was appointed lecturer of physics in the school of engineering." English names soon filled the vacant positions.

On 22 July 1898, *Al-Ahram* published what is tantamount to the obituary of the school. "We deeply regret the passing of the School of Medicine and what God has wrought upon the native Egyptians who had worked there and how it met an occupation far graver than an army's occupation of a fortress." Thus begins a new chapter in the history of Qasr Al-Aini, one that would be written almost entirely in English.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

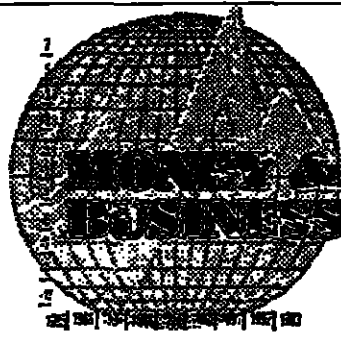


Free zone transfers

THE GENERAL INVESTMENT ORGANISATION has agreed to transfer 8 investment projects to free zones, among which will include 6 chemical projects at Port Said, New Damietta, 10 Ramadan City, Tibbin, Kafr Al-Zayat, Giza, Manyal Shihah; 3 foodstuffs projects and an engineering project on the Cairo-Ismailia Road.

The organisation seeks to transfer 10 other companies to free zones, among them 4 spinning and weaving companies, 2 chemical companies, 2 mineral companies, an engineering company and a foodstuffs company.

MONEY & BUSINESS



Egyptian exhibition in Jeddah

RUSHDI Saqr, chairman of the General Organisation of International Exhibitions and Marketing Affairs, announced that the 5th annual exhibition of Egyptian products, which took place at the International Exhibition Centre in Jeddah, and included more than 250 Egyptian companies representing the private investment and business sectors, had successfully realised its goals, which will boost Egyptian exports and open the Gulf market for Egyptian products. The conference's success was reflected by the large number of visitors, both businessmen and the general public.

15.9 per cent increase in Egyptian exports to Arab countries

A REPORT by the Central Organisation concerning foreign trade with Arab countries during the first 7 months of 1995 says that Egyptian exports with Arab countries have realised a

15.9 per cent growth in comparison with the same period in 1994. Likewise, imports from Arab countries have increased by 70.9 per cent. The value of Egyptian exports to Arab countries

reached LE928.1mn (\$272.9mn), up from LE800.3mn, making up 11.8 per cent of Egypt's total exports worldwide, in comparison with that of the same period in 1994.

The value of Egyptian exports to Jordan, Algeria, Sudan, Tunisia, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman and Somalia also witnessed an increase. However, the value of Egyptian exports to Saudi Arabia saw a decrease from LE260mn down to LE221.9mn. A similar decrease was found in Syria, dropping from LE133.4mn to LE103.8mn. Egyptian exports also felt a decrease in Yemen, Kuwait, Iraq, Bahrain, Djibouti and Mauritania.

Egyptian exports to Arab countries during July 1995 alone was LE127.1mn, down from 231.6mn, a difference of LE104.5mn.

The value of Egyptian imports from Arab countries during the first 7 months of 1995 reached LE529.3mn (\$266.1mn) up from LE529mn, an increase of 275.5mn, making up 4.2 per cent of Egypt's total imports worldwide, in comparison with 3.3 per cent in the same period of 1994.

Out of all Arab countries, Saudi Arabia imported the largest amount of Egyptian products, valued at LE509.1mn. Next in line was Libya with LE179.9mn, Lebanon with LE55.9mn, Jordan with LE21.5mn and Syria with LE16.2mn.

Egypt's commercial balance with other Arab countries during the first 7 months of 1995 was met with a surplus in Egypt's favour against most Arab countries except Saudi Arabia, Libya and Somalia. Egyptian exports to Saudi Arabia reached LE221.9mn, while imports from Saudi Arabia reached LE509.1mn. As for Libya, Egyptian exports reached LE104mn, and imports reached LE666 thousand.

Likewise, the report indicated a reduction in the value of Egyptian exports during the past July by 26 per cent, and furthermore a decrease in imports by 3.4 per cent. This is in comparison with July of 1994, when the volume of foreign commerce fell by 10.3 per cent, and the commercial balance deficit increased by 14.3 per cent.

The value of Egyptian exports during July 1995 decreased to LE1,153bn (\$339.1mn), from LE1,561bn during the same month in 1994. As imports in July 1995, they reached LE3,424bn (\$1,007), down from LE3,547bn.

This is reflected in the volume of foreign commerce, which decreased to LE4,578mn (\$1,346bn), down from LE5,108bn, while the commercial deficit increased to LE2,270bn (\$667.8mn) up from LE1,976bn in July 1994.

However, these July import and export figures did

not affect on the rise in value of Egyptian exports during the first 7 months of 1995, which grew by 31.8 per cent up from the same period of the previous year.

The value of Egyptian exports during the 7 months reached LE7,993bn (\$2,350), up from LE6,046, with petroleum exports making up LE2,860bn and non-petroleum exports making up LE5,006bn. The percentage of growth of the value of petroleum exports was 17.5 per cent, while the value of non-petroleum exports grew by 41.2 per cent.

As for Egyptian imports during the same 7 months, their value reached LE21,790bn (\$6,407bn) from LE16,039bn. Likewise, the value of foreign commerce reached LE28,784bn (\$8,760bn) up from LE22,104bn. The deficit in the commercial balance during the 7 months reached LE13,796bn (\$4,057bn), up from LE9,974bn during the same period in 1994.

Investment prospers despite instability in Bangladesh

Foreign investment is growing in Bangladesh despite political unrest, a government official said Monday. The administration expects foreign investment to reach US\$2.5bn by June.

In the past five months starting in July, the first month of the fiscal year, a total of 672 projects with an investment outlay of \$1.6bn had been registered with the Board of Investment, Towfique Elahi Chowdhury, chairman of the board, stated to reporters.

"Bangladesh is moving faster than many of its South Asian neighbours in opening up its economy resulting in huge foreign investments," Chowdhury said.

He said Japan topped the foreign investors list, contributing 62 per cent, followed by South Korea's 17 per cent and Malaysia's 13 per cent.

At least 35 per cent of the investment came to the textiles sector, followed by glass and ceramics. Chowdhury said even though frequent anti-government strikes have weakened the economy, the situation with foreign investment is still encouraging.

The political impasse began 22 months ago when agitated lawmakers walked out of parliament, accusing Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's government of corruption and incompetence.

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Pakistan's hard year of hope

As years go, 1995 was among the worst in Pakistan's history, writes **Eqbal Ahmad**

Civil war in Karachi continued unabated from the year's start to its end. Its balance sheet included 2,000 dead; 20,000 hapless citizens were arrested, beaten and held hostage for bribe and extortion; hundreds were tortured by the forces of the state and also by their opponents. Dozens died in government custody. As in 1971, the distinction was blurred between the terrorist and the state, crime and politics, and between citizen and enemy. Predictably, violence spread across the country. Powerful bombs destroyed properties and killed people in Peshawar and Islamabad too.

In an environment so steeped in crisis and failure of leadership, ordinary citizens worry and suffer, mostly in silence. The educated ones respond in a variety of ineffectual ways whereby words fail to connect with action. Most complain much and tell unreliable tales of corruption and astronomically lucrative under-the-table deals. Many wish a Khomeini on the country. Others want soldiers to take charge. On a flight to New York at the year's end, a businessman with investments in Germany argued fervently that what Pakistan needed was a Hitler with accessories — Gestapo et al. Another equally prosperous passenger invoked the necessity of a violent revolution. Both were oblivious of the very problematic relationship between their abstract wishes and personal circumstances.

Serious-minded people talk of the necessity of reform and system change. Proportional representation is one favoured option. A presidential form of government is another. There is broad-based support for decentralisation of government and devolution of power. As opposition leader, Benazir Bhutto successfully played on this consensus when she campaigned from the platform of a new social contract. It was a risky, half-baked proposition which she has mercifully forgotten. The paucity of serious debate over the promised social contract underlined, nevertheless, a striking absence of discussion, research or writing on reform alternatives. This phenomenon, more than any other, bodes ill for the future of this country. Society fails when its intelligentsia does.

The crisis of state and society is headed toward a climax in Pakistan. Historically, countries in our situation face four contrasting prospects. They can reform, undergo revolution, regress or gradually collapse in chaos. What course a country takes depends often on its intelligentsia, which, in modern history, has served as either the midwife or miscarrier of change. Like most human creations societies are built, rebuilt and sustained by ideas and values. As the most instructed class in a complex social order, the intelligentsia of today bears the greater responsibility to analyse honestly, inform fearlessly and try thus to better shape the future. This is by no means an easy challenge.

We live in a time of rapid and transforming social changes which bear within them the paradoxical forces of renewal and decay. Whether change brings chaos or progress depends on the set of choices a society makes, the course it favours. A seemingly small error in making social or economic choices can cause a country lasting losses. The problem of choice is compounded for three reasons. First, some choices toward entering the contemporary world were already made for us by the colonial powers, which had a head start in adapting to industrial modes of production and which colonised us to their benefit and at our expense. Yet not all colonial inheritance is rotten. There is need to sift the wheat in it from the chaff, a task to which we have failed, by and large, to attend.

The second difficulty lies in history, now more than a century old, of intellectual dependency. Steep decline in educational standards have vastly augmented this legacy in Pakistan. Knowledge, of course, is universal. As such it cannot be derivative. But to be valuable, knowledge, especially social knowledge, must be contextualised and advanced critically and creatively. It is precisely this faculty that colonial education was not designed to develop — and post-colonial education is not equipped to promote. As a result, Third World societies have tended to produce masses of comprador intellectuals on the left, centre and right. At best, we follow trends set elsewhere, and more often than not without contextualising and without advancing the frontiers of knowledge.

Examples abound. Here I cite one involving economic policy. When socialism was in fashion, left-of-centre intellectuals did accurately expose how and with what consequences pro-Western Third World governments pursued liberal blueprints provided by their metropolitan patrons and advisers. Well and good, though generally unoriginal. But they rarely noted that radical nationalist governments adopted aspects of socialist policy without anticipating their actual impact in a post-colonial environment. Thus the nationalisation programme of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, president then prime minister of Pakistan in the 1970s, was widely applauded by left-oriented intellectuals as a progressive policy. To my knowledge only a couple of expatriate Pakistani scholars argued at the time that this was in fact a regressive step likely to hurt the economy and reinforce the military-bureaucratic-feudal nexus. The most persuasive such conclusion was indicated in Hanna Alavi's seminal essay *The State in Post-Colonial Societies*.

Alavi's ground-breaking essay was rooted in a critical appreciation of Marxist postulates on the connection between class and state. Yet his conclusions differed markedly from those of Marx and Lenin. His originality lay in his comprehension of the nature of state and the national bourgeoisie in South Asia, and in his disposition to apply theory critically and contextually to a Third World environment. Alavi argued that the nexus of class domination in Pakistan lay in power more than in capital. In contrast to the West, the state developed in South Asia not in response to the needs of a national bourgeoisie but to fulfil colonial purposes. Our bourgeoisie, too, is a colonial creation which owes its wealth and influence to its links with the state. It would follow then that a programme of nationalisation would aid not the country and its people but the classes that run and control the state.

These days there are celebrations of market economy. Poor people and their anguish is so rarely mentioned that the World Bank has to draw our attention to them. Barring a few good souls like Akhtar Hameed Khan, social justice is on the national agenda only to the extent that international donors favour it. Intellectual dependency is a general phenomenon that engulfs the Westernised left and centre no less than the religious right. The research outfit of the *Jamaat-i-Islami* borrowed even its name from Washington DC.

Third, sources of learning are clogged in our country. The system of higher education has collapsed in its entirety in the liberal arts and sciences. It was a 19th-century system and colonial at that. But Lord Thomas Macaulay's conceptualisation had the virtues of its purpose which was, to use his own words, to create "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern". That purpose was fulfilled in so far as colonial education produced several generations of bureaucrats, military officers and politicians — a class that still mediates the relationship between post-colonial South Asia and the West. This is a testament indeed to the effectiveness of education in realising political, economic and social goals.

Five decades of neglect and mindless tampering condemned the colonial system of higher education to rot. Not one Pakistani government made a meaningful effort to maintain, much less restructure it. Rather, they distorted it by various means. One was to graft symbolic requirements into the curriculum. These, for example, religious (*Deeniyat*) and Pakistani studies, are mere formalities or worse — they offer opportunities to induct students into partisan beliefs rather than a process of comprehending religion or society. During 1990 I visited half a dozen well-known institutions and found that not one of these compared with low second-rate colleges in the United States and Europe. Barring a few professional schools, there is now in Pakistan not a single viable institution of learning and leadership preparation. The affluent send their offspring abroad.

Those who care keep struggling in this bleak environment. The good news is that there are more of them today than a decade or two ago. They are found in the cities, and also in unexpected nooks and forgotten corners of this unjustly ruled land. There lies the virtue even of a flawed democracy: hope and commitment to the common good do not have to hide any more.



Ethnic Masai warriors in Kenya, popularly called the Moran, celebrate an initiation rite held every six years. Both the ceremony and the Moran are major tourist attractions. The Kenyan economy depends on tourism and the production and export of coffee, tea, exotic fruit and vegetables for earning foreign currency (photo: Reuters)

Afro-Parisian rendezvous

Constrained by the legacy of colonialism, Africa's dependent status on its former colonial masters produced neither good politics nor good economics. So why should the Franco-British "conflict resolution" initiative offered African defence ministers in Paris this week achieve results, asks **Gamal Nkrumah**

Last week, French Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette and his British counterpart Michael Rooker agreed that "France and Britain have similar stances on Africa". They have the biggest stakes in Africa among European Union countries. Therefore, the Franco-British scheme for African security needs has met with a mixed reception on the continent. But that did not stop 36 African foreign and defence ministers from travelling to Paris last week to listen to the latest Franco-British plans for policing the African continent.

France offered last Thursday to mediate in the dispute over the Red Sea islands of Hanish between Eritrea and Yemen. France, which has a huge military base in the Horn of Africa city state of Djibouti across the Bab Al-Mandab from Aden, hosted a Franco-African meeting in Paris last week to discuss a Franco-British conflict resolution initiative in Africa. France also hopes to launch a French-controlled "pan-African" army.

The new Franco-British initiative sent shock waves throughout Africa. It comes at a time when British bilateral aid to sub-Saharan Africa is being reduced by 18 per cent between 1994-95 and 1997-98. Britain today spends a mere 0.3 per cent of its Gross National Product (GNP) on aid — a figure which falls far short of the 0.7 per cent recommended by the United Nations. French international development aid fell from \$9.11 billion in 1994 to \$8.97 billion in 1995.

French President Jacques Chirac and his advisor on African affairs, Fernand Wibaux, met this week with the directors of Thomson-CSF, Matra and Aérospatiale — France's major arms manufacturers. The involvement of the French arms industry is seen as instrumental in the launching of a French-controlled "pan-African" army.

France has traditionally understood that boosting arms sales and reviving competition in the arms industry is a matter for individual European governments. It is not just a question of the market forces in Africa. Political heavyweights, like France, invariably win the biggest armaments orders and they tend to make the most money from the arms trade.

For a few dollars more in bribes,

many African ministers of defence are more than willing to sign contracts with foreign arms suppliers. The African countries concerned then don the poisoned chalice of military security promised by Western arms suppliers. In fact, the "only warning sign you need of famine is lists of which governments are spending disproportionate amounts of their GNP on military activities", a British geographer, Lloyd Timberlake, remarked back in 1984.

The demand for arms by African dictators, opposition forces and secessionist movements keeps the African arms trade going. Twelve years ago, enormous amounts of grain shipments to Africa at a time of severe droughts hid the fact that 1984 was also the first year that the value of African defence procurements outstripped the value of imported grain.

America's Lockheed Martin had a turnover of \$22.5 billion in 1994; Boeing, one of \$21.6 billion; and McDonnell Douglas, one of \$12.6 billion. By comparison, European arms producers trailed behind. Daimler-Benz Aerospace (Dasa) of Germany had an annual turnover of \$9.1 billion in 1994; British Aerospace (BAe), one of \$9.3 billion; while Aérospatiale of France had a figure of \$8.7 billion. So is the Franco-British initiative a plot to up profits? Africa is no big market for advanced warplanes, missile technology and defence electronics which have emerged in the 1990s as the major growth areas of the European arms industry. So what do poor African nations purchase from European arms manufacturers?

British arms exporters have a stake in Nigeria's defence plans. Britain might be one of the most vociferous critics of human rights abuses in Nigeria, but it heads the list of countries exporting arms to Nigeria. Last June, Britain issued licences for British CS gas and rubber bullets to be exported to Nigeria. Needless to say, British CS gas and rubber bullets were used to quell popular resistance to the military authorities and to put down peaceful demonstrations. France's record is not any better.

"France ranked first in arms transfer agreements with developing nations," the US Congressional Research Service revealed earlier in the year. France monopolises a significant slice of the Af-

rican arms market. It increased its arms contracts from \$3.8 billion to \$11.4 billion in the past year alone. By comparison, the US saw its share drop from over 60 per cent in 1993 to 24 per cent in 1994. As the largest arms supplier to the Third World, France sold weapons worth \$2.4 billion in 1994. Paradoxically, just as France is fast gaining new arms customers in the South, it is coming to grips with serious attempts at reforming its own armaments industry. New technologies are being introduced which are capital intensive. Fewer hands and better qualified minds are needed to carry out the transformations.

French Defence Minister Charles Millon confessed that French arms manufacturers now need billions in bailouts. French arms exports fell after the end of the Cold War. French Prime Minister Alain Juppé's government is under intense pressure to cut an overall budget deficit that ran to \$64 billion in 1995. The defence budget stands at \$20 billion, and Millon is hoping to bring that down to \$15 billion. The French Ministry of Defence's General Delegation on Armaments predicts that France's arms industry could lose up to 50,000 jobs by the year 2000. The delegation is looking into ways of reforming the ailing French armaments industry.

France is known to have made repeated offers to supply the proposed "pan-African" army with affordable arms. While Africa's purchasing power is limited because of a perennial shortage of funds, border disputes and civil wars are multiplying across the continent because of political instability. Africa offers no prospect of major defence procurements. Cash-strapped African states cannot afford sophisticated and high-precision state-of-the-art technology.

Armies in Africa are preoccupied with defending military, dictatorial regimes or quasi-democratic, but no less dogmatic, ones. The defence forces in Africa are more often than not poised against domestic danger rather than external threats. The forces of social change are legion. As economies stagnate, social unrest ensues and civil wars erupt all over the continent, African uncertainty over the implications of the Franco-British "conflict resolution" initiative in Africa makes questionable the

former colonial powers' capacity to sustain peace on the continent. Africa still lacks the political will to act as one in matters of defence. But it is Africa's lack of political consensus that is largely to blame for its dependence on former colonial powers for its defence.

The perceived Franco-British paternalistic preoccupation with Africa's security derives from the humiliating memory of colonialism and the stigma attached to being labelled neo-colonial. France may have long discarded the fastidiousness with which it treated the historical decolonisation process, but the reverberations of the painful process rumble on in African capitals. We need no reminders with the Comoros debacle, and French military intervention in Rwanda's civil war in the 1994 "Operation Turquoise" is still fresh in our minds.

Between 1960, when most African countries gained their independence, and 1989, when the Cold War came to a close, defence spending in the South jumped from \$24 billion to \$175 billion. Many African nations spend twice as much on defence as on health and education combined.

"There is a lot of blood, death and destruction in the Third World that's being fed by [Western arms exporters]," warned Paul George of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute recently. Britain tops the military list; it has issued British companies 30 licences to export non-lethal equipment, including component parts for tanks and missiles, to Nigeria and an additional 20 licences to ship machine guns, bombs, missiles and mines there. France exported armoured reconnaissance vehicles to the politically unstable West African giant, Sweden sold it howitzers and Germany, military trucks. Nigeria also bought 300 armoured personnel carriers from Austria.

The UN Development Programme has long stressed that "when military spending takes priority, human development performance is poor". By 1991, the Third World was buying 75 per cent of all arms traded. The reduction of military spending in the South must be coupled with the halting of arms transfers from the North. The Paris meeting this week makes clear that the North fuels the impetus for the militarisation of the South.

India and Pakistan

LAST week Indian and Pakistani troops traded fire along the Kashmiri border. The skirmishes were sparked when Pakistan claimed that an Indian rocket attack had killed over 20 Pakistanis. Indian defence sources said Indian and Pakistani troops at four observation posts exchanged machine-gun fire intermittently throughout the week.

Last Sunday, Pakistani President Farouk Ahmed Leghari, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and the army chief, General Jehangir Karamat, discussed the border situation at a joint meeting in Islamabad.

The meeting came as Pakistani political leaders condemned the rocket attack and called for "appropriate measures" to counter India's nuclear capability and surface-to-surface missiles. But Pakistani and Indian leaders have downplayed the risks of the border clashes, escalating into a full-fledged war between the two nuclear states.

Democracy toppled

LAST SATURDAY troops under the command of army chief-of-staff Colonel Ibrahim Barre Maïnassara ousted Niger's President Mahamane Ousmane, the first democratically elected leader of the country. The troops attacked the presidential palace in Niamey, the capital of the West African state.

Maïnassara was officially proclaimed president of the new National Salvation Committee, set up to take over all powers. The 1992 constitution, which was approved by 89.8 per cent of Niger's electorate, was suspended. The National Assembly dissolved and all political parties banned.

Niger gained independence from France in 1960. It is one of the poorest countries in the world, with most of its foreign revenue coming from the export of uranium.

Compiled by **Heba Samir**

Pacific islanders unpacified

A tribal faction aspiring to self-rule in the remote Indonesian island of Irian Jaya has caused an international stir by taking Indonesian and European scientists hostage. **Mariz Tadros** explores the reasons behind the rebellion

Crisis erupted on 8 January in the eastern Indonesian region of Irian Jaya. The region was ceded to Indonesia in 1963 by the former colonial power, the Netherlands. Twenty-six scientists from Indonesia, Britain and the Netherlands were conducting research on the flora and fauna of Irian Jaya when they were kidnapped by a faction of the Free Papua New Guinea Movement (OPM). The faction vowed that any Indonesian use of military might would threaten the lives of the hostages. Since then the secessionists have freed half the hostages on a sporadic basis.

According to reports from Indonesia, negotiations are continuing in search of a solution to the problem of the 13 remaining hostages, who include seven Indonesians, four Britons and two Dutch citizens. The Indonesian government, however, is starting to lose its patience. Indonesia deployed 120 soldiers from its elite forces to the area, but no confrontations have occurred. Time is running out, with Indonesia's army reported to have set Sunday 28 February as the deadline for the OPM faction to hand over all the hostages. An Indonesian officer who wished to remain anonymous told a news agency: "I am optimistic that we can solve the problem without a single shot being fired."

Yet it seems unlikely that, even if the hostages are released, a solution to the real problem underlying the whole affair can be reached. The problem is rooted in the politics of the post-colonial Pacific order and involves more than just a tribal faction — which

is estimated to include no more than 300 fighters.

When the OPM kidnapped the research team, the kidnapping aimed to bring to the world's attention the plight of the Irian Jaya tribes and other tribes living in the region. But the outcome has done little to highlight their cause. Instead of serious debate, most accounts in the world media have focused on the tribesmen's "exotic" dress.

The OPM faction has been fighting for Irian Jaya to be autonomous since the region became Indonesian in 1963. According to Pacific historian Dr Firth Fry, the rise of ethno-nationalist secessionist movements in the Pacific has been rapidly gaining pace in the post-colonial era. Stephanie Lawson, a political scientist specialising in Pacific affairs, has remarked that political fragmentation befit traditional Pacific societies that had to adapt themselves to the Western concepts of "nation-state" and "nationalism". Tribes, whose heads were forced to take second place to a government leader who did not share or represent their distinct linguistic, cultural and territorial interests, became increasingly disillusioned about the legitimacy of the state they happened to reside in.

Self-determination, autonomy and territorial independence — all Western concepts imbued in the UN Declaration of Human Rights — became the battle cries of many emerging ethno-nationalist movements. If the Irian Jaya tribes are allowed even

partial autonomy, it is likely to have a domino effect among the many ethno-nationalist movements seeking autonomy in the Pacific — especially in the case of the Bougainvillians.

Bougainville, Irian Jaya's neighbour, is an island which is territorially part of Papua New Guinea. But its inhabitants see themselves as ethnically distinct from mainland Papua New Guineans. Bougainvillian guerrilla units have been at war with the government for the last nine years, but have not succeeded in changing the status quo.

This seems to be the general trend all across the Pacific. The struggles have gone on for decades and hundreds of lives have been lost. But no disputes have been settled. The ethno-nationalist movements of the Pacific are seeking either autonomy from what they perceive to be illegitimate governments or they are embroiled in struggles for total independence from neo-colonial masters.

According to Steve Hoadley, who is documenting the changing political and economic landscape of the region, many Pacific peoples have experienced a deteriorating standard of living due to government corruption, the confiscation of their lands or a forced change of lifestyle. While the Irian Jaya tribes continue to live as their ancestors did, their very existence has been at times threatened by Indonesia's plans for land development and cultural assimilation. Attempts to pacify, ignore or repress these movements have mostly failed, if not led to disastrous consequences.



The director of Japan Graphic Designers Association, U G Sato (centre) displays posters protesting against France's resumption of nuclear testing in the Pacific this week (photo: JMI)

Rights under fire

Both governments and non-governmental political groups are to blame for worsening human rights violations worldwide, writes **Rachad Antonius**

Despite some timid moves towards more democratic systems here and there, the human rights situation in Third World countries is rather gloomy. Governments have not hesitated to use violent means of repression such as imprisonment, torture and sometimes extra-judicial killings. Practically all governments on the Asian and African continents and in Latin America are guilty, to different degrees, of such violations.

In China, for instance, dissidents have been imprisoned, condemned to hard labour and subjected to harsh treatment; the cases of Harry Wu and Wei Jingseng have been widely reported in the press. In Burma, the leader of the opposition, Aung San Suu Kyi, has been freed after six years of house arrest, but violent confrontation with armed opposition groups have continued.

In Nigeria, the government has brutally repressed the people in Ogoniland who were expressing their concerns about the environmental damage caused by the oil installations of Shell. Writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists were executed on 10 November. These condemnations to death after a mock trial have, of course, provoked a strong wave of criticism, to which Third World governments are increasingly sensitive. One pernicious effect of this state of affairs is that governments resort to killing activists on the spot where they are arrested and then claim that they opposed their arrest violently. This kind of extra-judicial killing has been on the rise in many Third World countries.

This short list of violations illustrates a general trend, but only some cases make it to the international headlines. Of course, not all cases of violations are as brutal as the ones mentioned above. In most cases, the violations involve intimidation, the closure of newspapers and the firing of their editors, and electoral fraud.

Other forms of human rights violations are more subtle, and their long-term effects may even run much deeper — but they are not always seen as human rights issues. One type is associated with the rise of religious fundamentalism — in all religions. The other is associated with the new economic world order. In 1995, violations of human rights deriving from these two factors were on the increase.

There is something common to all fundamentalisms. Fundamentalists of all religions are absolutely convinced that they hold the ultimate and absolute truth, and that when they talk, it is the voice of the Almighty that speaks. Consequently, they believe that anyone who opposes them opposes God, and they, therefore, give themselves the right to kill anybody who does not conform to their understanding of religion.

Moreover, they feel insulted if they are compared to fundamentalists of other religions, because they consider themselves not fundamentalists, but true believers and the others to be in the wrong. This, too, is common.

This is essentially a human rights issue, as fundamentalists deny their fellow citizens the most fundamental rights — the right to think, the right to express their beliefs and the right to behave accordingly. But the threat is compounded by an unhealthy process that obtains in most Third World countries and which develops more or less as follows: fundamentalists organise themselves politically to seize power, sometimes through elections; governments react by repressing these political movements, usually by undemocratic means; these movements then claim that they are victims and that their human rights are violated. In their fights with the government, they do not hesitate to commit violence themselves against fellow citizens and they promote an ideology of excluding those who think differently — whether of the same religion or not.

Thus, we have witnessed the killings of journalists and teachers in Algeria by the Islamic Action Group (GIA) and attacks on thinkers across the globe. In Pakistan, people have been killed by angry crowds because they had wrongly been accused of blasphemy; members of the Muslim Ahmadiya sect have been particularly targeted, but they were not the only ones. In several other countries, members of a minority religious group have been killed by political groups under various pretexts — usually that they have committed blasphemy or been police informers.

The international instruments defining human rights consider social and economic rights as fundamental as basic liberties; without a minimum of bread assured, a human being can be subjected to a degree of humiliation that affects his fundamental human dignity, and that is seen as a violation of human rights.

The problems of poverty in the Third World are compounded by structural adjustment policies, by virtue of which the state promotes a free market that leaves many people falling through the holes of a non-existent social security net. Such policies make victims among the most vulnerable groups in developed countries too, and particularly in the former Soviet bloc.

In some cases, the victims of such policies have been specific social groups. In Russia, it is women who have been the first to suffer from the transition to the open market system. In Brazil, scores of children are homeless; street children have been killed because they were a nuisance to the business districts. Some of them have been abducted and killed and their organs sold for medical transplants.

Western democracies are not immune to these problems. The state is increasingly withdrawing from responsibilities it once assumed. In every developed country, tens of thousands of people are out of jobs; many fall on welfare, and the number of people under the poverty line increases constantly. Some will argue that these do not constitute violations of human rights, at least not of the same degree as those found in more authoritarian systems. That may well be true, but, nevertheless, this situation represents a trend that implies a loss of rights previously taken for granted.

Moreover, the rise of fundamentalism — of the Christian variety — and of xenophobic tendencies in many developing countries means that people seeking refuge there find it harder and harder to escape the conditions that drove them away from their homes. Haitians, Mexicans and, more recently, Cubans arriving in the United States as refugees have found it more difficult to be accepted and have sometimes been simply and summarily deported.

There is no miracle cure to improve the human rights situation in the world. But constant efforts to bring to light the various violations, so as to permit prosecution of those convicted of such crimes, are one step in the right direction. The other step is to question constantly the ideologies that justify the domination of some people over others on the basis of gender, religion or ethnic identity. And finally, striving to establish the rule of law in handling political opposition in Third World countries, even when this opposition is itself violent and anti-democratic, is another step towards building a society that deserves to be called humane.

Angst over asylum bill

The British Conservative Party has an awful lot to answer for. The Tories have resolved to terminate the right to social security benefits for asylum seekers from the Third World who are appealing against the rejection of their claims by the British Home Office. The benefits have been cut on the grounds that most appeals are considered to be bogus.

The Tory-instigated get-tough tactics against Third World asylum seekers in Britain was not given unanimous, enthusiastic cross-party support. Quite a few Labour Party members of parliament protested vehemently. Black Labour MP, Bernie Grant, was the most vociferous critic of the new bill. Grant warned that the bill was designed to stir up racist sentiment in Britain. He also warned that it was deliberately presented in such a way so as to arouse the resentment of a majority of the British public, who are outraged because of the invasion of "undesirable aliens" into the country. Many Britons are incensed that the state is obliged to provide housing benefits, tax benefits and free National Health Service medical treatment and education grants for "bogus" asylum seekers.

The new proposed legislation was criticised by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which claimed that certain aspects of the new bill could actually

Currently, asylum seekers in Britain have the right to appeal if their applications are rejected. New proposed legislation designed to curb immigration will penalise political refugees, warns **Gamil Nkrumah**

penalise asylum seekers. The bill draws up a "white list" of Third World and Eastern European countries where it says political persecution does not exist. How ironic, for the "white list" is mostly composed of black countries. Many of the countries listed are former British colonies — now Commonwealth nations.

The UNHCR warned that the new bill contravened the UN Convention on Refugees. Among the immigrant communities in Britain, it is widely feared that charities and soup kitchens will be incapable of coping with the pauperised asylum seekers, who will be deprived of benefits previously taken for granted. In an unprecedented development, their children will be barred from educational grants.

The UNHCR warned that the bill would mean Britain would be "squarely in violation of several treaty obligations, in particular Article 22 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child". The UNHCR likewise cautioned that the new bill would "inevitably expose large numbers of individuals, including particularly vulnerable groups, to the worst effects of impoverishment".

The bill comes at a time when racial tensions are on the rise in Britain. Not long ago, a British Department of Health study revealed that racist abuse of black British nurses by patients was on the rise. The Policy Studies Institute published a report commissioned by the Department of Health. "In every case study area looked at, and in nearly every speciality within these areas, ethnic minority nurses reported having been racially harassed by patients. Despite this, they were expected not to make a fuss and to get on with their jobs. They did not have the right to refuse treating the racist patients who were making their working lives so difficult," the report stated. Moreover, it commented, ethnic minorities are discriminated against by employers.

The report gives little hope to asylum seekers and paints a rather grim picture of life in the country they are fleeing to. Britain cannot even provide protection for its political refugees. Ali Mehmed Abu Zeid, a leading Libyan dissident, was stabbed to death in his London grocery store last November.

The irony is that while Britain claims to support human rights in Third World

nations, cutting aid and curbing trade with countries where gross violations of human rights are rampant, it is making it impossible for the very victims of the violations to take refuge in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, influential Third World countries are pressuring Britain to rid itself of political refugees who are seen as troublemakers.

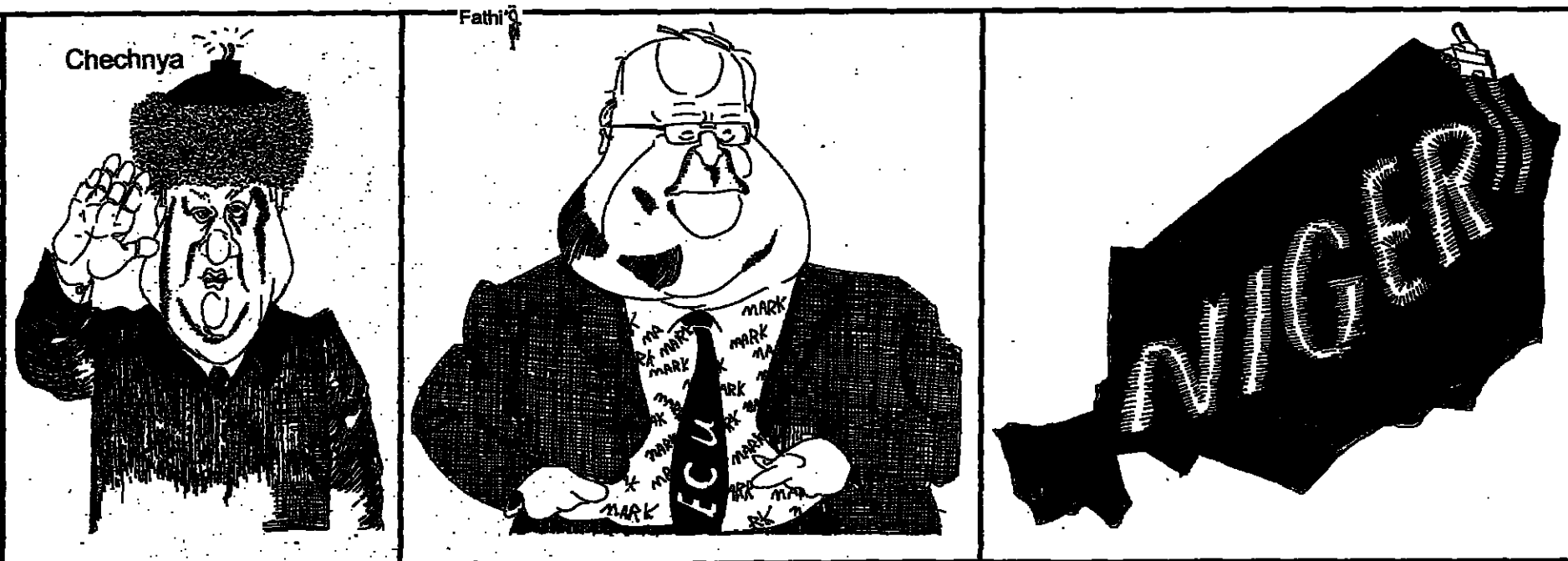
The paradox is that Third World asylum seekers not considered troublesome enough are turned back because they are said to be bogus. If however, they are regarded as being too troublesome, they are deported for souring relations between Britain and friendly foreign powers. A case in point is that of the London-based Saudi dissident Mohamed Al-Mas'ari, who is struggling against a deportation order to the Caribbean island-nation of Dominica by the Home Office because of Tory fears of losing several arms deals between Vickers — and other British arms manufacturers — and the Saudis. Vickers has a \$4.5 billion deal now pending for selling tanks to Saudi Arabia.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, is currently the country with the largest number of nationals seeking asy-

lun in Britain. In the first half of 1995, there were 3,225 Nigerians hoping to find refuge in Britain from political persecution and repression at home. There were also 1,410 applicants to Britain from Algeria — a country embroiled in political turmoil which has claimed 60,000 lives in the past three years. Nevertheless, only 30 Algerians were granted political asylum in Britain and a further 20 were given extended leave to remain in the country, according to UNHCR statistics.

While a third of all asylum seekers apply at London's Heathrow International Airport and other British ports of entry, the remainder apply for political asylum only after they have entered the country as tourists and students. The new laws are designed to hit the latter category hardest. Such "in-country" asylum seekers will no longer qualify for any state benefits and nor will those appealing against rejected applications receive any benefits.

All eyes are now turned to the House of Commons. British ethnic minorities want the Tories routed on the proposed asylum rules. Demoralised asylum seekers are in a precarious position; their future hangs in the balance. They came to Britain's shores to find refuge, but now find themselves cornered between the Home Office devil and the deep blue sea.



NAM nations call for a nuke-free world

Just as France set off a sixth underground nuclear blast in the Pacific last Sunday, delegates from both the industrially advanced nations of the North and the developing countries of the South converged on Geneva to discuss nuclear disarmament. France last week promised to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty by May. Paris has also indicated that it will sign the South Pacific Nuclear Test Zone Treaty and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The 38-nation Conference on Disarmament, convening in Geneva last week, agreed to try to work out a complete global ban on nuclear testing by mid-1996. Mumar Zahrani, the permanent representative of Egypt at the United Nations in Geneva and the head of the Egyptian delegation to the conference, was chosen to head the working group dealing with legal matters. His main task will be to bring closer the various conflicting views of the big five nuclear powers and the non-nuclear nations before June so that a draft agreement can be ready before the UN General Assembly convenes to discuss the matter in September.

Meanwhile, Egypt and the other Non-Aligned Movement nations, known collectively at the conference as the Group of 21, are trying to put forward an independent resolution on the banning of nuclear weapons worldwide.

The 38-member Conference on Disarmament resumed in Geneva last week. The participants favoured the rapid conclusion of a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, writes **Gamil Ibrahim** from Geneva

Western negotiators said the main obstacle to reaching a test-ban treaty this year would be if Third World countries forced the conference to hold simultaneous talks on nuclear disarmament. The Third World is reluctant to budge on this critical issue.

The Non-Aligned nations want to have a timetable for the elimination of nuclear weapons. The Group of 21 is in unanimous agreement with Egypt's proposal that it is no longer sufficient to reach an agreement on the banning of nuclear testing, but it is imperative that the world gets rid of its nuclear arsenal.

Speaking on behalf of the Group of 21, Jose Urutia from Peru expressed his regret that certain member-states were unwilling to negotiate on the issue of nuclear disarmament at the conference. He

further stated that members of the Group of 21 were of the view that an agreement had to be reached among members of the conference for the inclusion of an agenda item on nuclear disarmament and the immediate re-establishment of an ad hoc committee to negotiate a nuclear disarmament treaty. Last year's conference to renew the NPT had adopted a resolution on principles and objectives in this matter.

Negotiators have said a proposed text for the treaty still contains more than 1,000 points of contention, but they have suggested such points could be resolved quickly if momentum builds towards an accord.

One of the key issues remaining is whether China, which has been holding out for a provision for "peaceful nuclear explosions" for constructing canals and other projects, will join with Britain, France, the United States and Russia in agreeing to

a total ban on nuclear explosions. Since it is very difficult to ascertain whether nuclear explosions are for peaceful or military purposes, there is a heated debate as to whether nuclear tests should be banned altogether.

In a message to the conference, US President Bill Clinton expressed his support for a comprehensive ban on nuclear weapons testing. "In over 2,000 explosions in more than 20 locations, their deadly success was well established," he said. However, a number of aspiring nuclear countries object to the fact that the established nuclear countries would be able to rely on their nuclear stockpile even after a comprehensive test ban.

Similarly, UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali backed the demands of the Group of 21. "In the light of the adoption by the Security Council of Resolution 984 and declarations by the nuclear-weapon states concerning both positive and negative security assurances, [Third World demands] also must be carefully considered," he wrote in a letter to the conference. "Transforming these unilateral declarations into a legally binding international instrument would help allay the many understandable concerns of non-nuclear-weapon states."

AL-Ahram Weekly

MAD no more

While members of the Group of 21 countries, including the nations of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), participating in last week's Conference on Disarmament were pushing for a complete ban on nuclear weapons, Western nations hemmed, hawed and tried to redirect the focus of the discussions to merely banning nuclear testing.

These industrialised nations, headed by the main nuclear powers with the exception of China, pledged their support for several nuclear test ban treaties, but balked at dismantling their existing nuclear arsenal. This is an ironic stand to take in a conference on disarmament, further highlighting the irony behind last year's debate on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The reluctance of these developed nations to wholeheartedly subscribe to disarmament is indicative of the duplicity with which they approach global security matters. Always quick to point the finger at developing countries for allegedly lax security measures, when the opportunity comes for the West to take a concrete step for stability and peace, one would have expected them to leap on it. This, sadly, is not the case.

At the height of the Cold War, the super-powers were all too eager to break free from the concept of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) and sought to hammer out the SALT I and SALT II treaties. But the collapse of the Soviet Union has served to redefine Western "security interests". With four out of the five nuclear powers being members of NATO, the balance of power has shifted tremendously in favour of the West. Dismantling existing stockpiles would leave these countries at a disadvantage and all but negate their ability to "walk softly and carry a big stick".

But, forced to make concessions before the NAM nations and the developing world as proof of their commitment to promoting international security and stability, the nuclear powers would sooner sign a test ban treaty. It, after all, would force them to sacrifice nothing while allowing them to continue to blame emerging and developing nations for being conduits for bomb-grade uranium. In the best tradition of Western brinkmanship, this move is a coup. It is also foolhardy and likely to blow up in their face.

Redrawing the development map

Ibrahim Nafie outlines the changes necessary in our understanding of development if Egypt is to enter the next century as a fairer and less divided society



Where does Egypt stand as we prepare to enter the 21st century? Who are we to believe? Should we take note of those who claim that Egypt is to be stranded by the march of progress, or lend an ear to the people who insist that in the blink of an eye we can bridge the ever widening gulf between the Third and First worlds?

Egypt is, admittedly, not a country rich in natural resources. It does, however, have a wealth of human resources. Egypt also possesses unique geographical assets and an incomparable depth of history. Taken together these three factors certainly give us cause for optimism. With proper management they should ensure that we are able to enter the next century with optimism.

We cannot, however, take refuge in blind hope. Our optimism must be tempered by the realisation that for Egypt to be able to assume her rightful place in the coming century we must first examine what is actually possible, objectively evaluating the options we face so that we can ensure that we make the best choices.

Egypt possesses no great mineral or petroleum wealth. Cultivable land is scarce and water supplies are barely sufficient to meet our present needs. Any future expansion in the area of land under cultivation will require a radical change in patterns of water consumption.

Given these facts it is imperative that we transcend the prevalent, but unfortunately narrow, perspectives on development that relate progress to relative advantages in the possession of natural resources. The real challenge Egypt faces, as the present century draws to a close, is to re-formulate its development strategies in such a way as to negotiate the conflicting claims of a burgeoning population on limited resources.

The challenge, then, is to transform what might appear a weakness — a growing population — into a strength. And this requires that we undertake a number of urgent reforms. It is imperative that we overhaul our education system and improve the mechanisms that might ensure a more equitable distribution of the benefits that will accrue from enhanced development.

We must urgently address the discrepancy between levels of investment and services in the government sector. For example, per capita investment averages less than LE200 per annum in the governorates of Fayoum, Giza and Al-Menoufiya, while it is more than LE2,000 in Cairo, Qal-

ioubiya, Port Said and Aswan. The contrast becomes even sharper when we look at the figures from Sinai and the Red Sea, where the per capita share of investment is LE10,343 and LE6,913 respectively. While economic liberalisation places investment decisions largely in the hands of private business, the government still has an important role to play in offsetting current imbalances.

Egypt's infrastructure has developed as unevenly as patterns of investment. Take water supply as an example: per capita consumption of fresh water in Cairo is 604 litres per day, as opposed to less than 100 litres in provincial governorates stretching from Qena in Upper Egypt to Matruh in the Delta. Similarly, per capita consumption of electrical power in Cairo is 1,195 kwh as compared to an average of less than 250

kwh in eight governorates in both Upper and Lower Egypt. Sewage systems serve 70.9 per cent of Cairo's population, compared to less than 10 per cent of the residents of 11 provincial governorates.

Equally distressing is the situation that prevails with respect to access to education. High-school-age children enjoy a 70 per cent registration rate in Cairo and Port Said compared to less than 50 per cent in many other governorates.

All the figures cited above underscore the fact that a large segment of the country's population is deprived of its fair share of the benefits that come with development. Rectifying such an inequitable distribution of wealth and services has become a matter of urgency — it is driven less by the imperatives of economic good sense than by the desire to ensure social justice prevails. It is certainly no coincidence that terrorism has taken root in precisely those governorates that are most disadvantaged.

Both the government and the presidency have repeatedly stressed the need to enhance social justice. Several large projects have been instigated to turn such desires into a reality, the most ambitious being the National Project for the Development of Upper Egypt and the National Project for the Development of the Sinai. It will, however, be some time before such projects begin to bear fruit.

In assessing the progress of such long term projects we must bear in mind that instances frequently arise when decision makers are forced to deviate from their original plans. They are subject to any number of pressures, from organised groups and concerned institutions and businesses, all of whom crave a larger share of the cake. In the competition among the governorates for a greater stake in the profits of development, the regions with the largest urban communities, particularly the capital city, inevitably have the upper hand. The majority of Egypt's politicians, journalists and opinion makers are residents of Cairo. The capital's citizens, by virtue of their close proximity to centres of power, are able to influence the decision making process in a far more direct way than is the case in the provinces. Yet bringing such enterprises as the Sinai and Upper Egypt development projects to fruition demands that government resist the tendency, promoted by special interest groups, to favour large urban conglomerations over less densely populated areas.

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A parliament for the world

During his last visit to Cairo in the final week of 1995, Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali met with the members of Al-Ahram's Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, which he headed for many years before becoming Secretary-General of the United Nations. The meeting focused on the problems now facing the world organisation, more specifically, how the ongoing celebrations of its fiftieth anniversary can be used to update its structure in line with the requirements of the post-bipolar world game.

As the discussion proceeded to address ways and means of re-vamping the UN, I proposed that an idea worth considering is the creation of a world parliament under its aegis, elected directly by all citizens of the world, exactly as the European Union has a European Parliament, side by side with the national parliaments of its member states.

Naturally, the proposal will require a great deal of time and effort to be translated into reality, but I believe it has many merits as we stand on the threshold of a new millennium. As I see it, a world parliament would respond to the requirements of an age in which many of the givens we once took for granted are changing.

The Nation-state is no longer the exclusive cornerstone of the world system, with the assumption of inviolable state sovereignty lying at its very heart coming under challenge from many quarters. Modern technology provides great powers with the means to violate the territorial integrity of any state; Chernobyl proved that state frontiers do not protect states from a nuclear breakdown in other states; ecological pollution knows no boundaries; etc.

If it hopes to reflect the new realities accurately, the United Nations, which represent the world system, cannot proceed according to a rationale that recognises only the nation-state as a valid frame of reference, but must adopt new frames of reference which regard humankind as a global entity, an integral whole transcending the limitations of the nation-state. And for the citizens of that entity to be democratically represented by a body upholding their collective interests, a world parliament elected directly by them is necessary.

The parameters of international law are no longer defined in terms of the nation-state alone. The UN has had to enact a Law of the Sea, laws for outer space, etc. International conferences are increasingly addressing issues of a planetary dimension, that is, issues which cut across borders to

Has the time come for a world parliament, along the lines of the European parliament, but extending to represent humankind as one indivisible unit? **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** discusses why the issue has become relevant

presuppose some sort of planetary citizenship transcending the nation-state (women, pollution, poverty, population, etc.).

In a way, the federal structure of the United States can serve as a model in miniature for the constitutional structure we are proposing for the entire planet, with the states of the Union comparable to the states of the world and the US Congress (and more specifically, the House of Representatives) to the World Parliament. Elections to Congress are direct, irrespective of the relatively independent legal prerogatives enjoyed by the states of the Union. Within this frame of reference, blacks and other American minority communities have been able to acquire many of their civil rights. Such a system does not necessarily favour the privileged at the expense of the poor and the marginalised.

A world parliament which would respect the anti-apartheid principle of 'one person-one vote', will give the South a much more authoritative voice in world affairs. Even if the world parliament enjoys only limited prerogatives to start with, which is likely to be the case, it will boost

the moral if not the material authority of the South, becoming a balancing factor against the all-exclusive authority of the great powers in the United Nations today and reducing the gap between North and South. It will also help democratise world organisations and institutions.

It can be argued, of course, that a world parliament along these lines will favour states like China and India at the expense of great powers like France and England, because the criterion in representation will be the sheer number of citizens in each independent state, a criterion which will work against the developed countries with limited populations. But that is precisely why this proposal is not only useful but also deeply democratic, because it would help redress a balance tilted sharply in favour of developed societies whose qualitative edge effectively neutralises the quantitative edge of the less developed.

The sustainability of any post-bipolar world order will depend on narrowing the gap between North and South. A world parliament genuinely concerned with improving the lot of all its constituents will help do just that. After all, 'post-bipolar' should mean a 'multi-', or better still, a 'non-polar' world order; certainly not a 'uni-polar' world order where a few are more equal than the rest. And how better to achieve that than through the proposed world parliament?

In the Thursday edition of *Al-Wafd*, daily mouthpiece of the liberal Wafd Party, Abdel-Aziz Mohamed wrote an article, entitled "A Nation rises from the first", arguing that what has taken place lays the basis for a Palestinian state. "The Palestinian people have put in place the cornerstone for their state and proceeded along a path that could be arduous and long, but which in the flicker of an eye is transforming them into a nation? There is not one nation in our region which has not undergone a similar transformation. Egypt in 1922 gained a restricted independence which left it in a state of self-rule only. The commander of the army in those days was British and so was the commander of the police. In every ministry there was a British adviser who was in reality the minister. And even in the judiciary there were foreign judges. There were restrictions on the parliament's powers. It was the same with Jordan, Iraq

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In Rose El-Youssef on Sunday Ahmed Hamroush wrote an article entitled: "At last, Yasser Arafat President" in which he recalls a conversation with Arafat in 1984: "I remember something he said when we were discussing holding an international conference in Cairo in 1984 in solidarity with the Palestinian people's

Distant minarets

By Naguib Mahfouz

I have fond memories of the time when, at the age of seven, I first fasted in Ramadan. I would climb to the rooftop of our house and stare at the minaret of Al-Husseini Mosque, waiting for the imam to announce the end of the fast at sunset. During my childhood Ramadan was the only time of the year I was allowed out in the evenings to play with my friends.

What I miss during Ramadan today is the atmosphere I used to encounter in the district of Al-Husseini where I lived as a child. In the past, after *Iftar*, it was customary for wealthy families to sponsor evening gatherings where songs and verses in honour of the prophet would be recited and performed. Others would open their homes to visitors, inviting people in to hear Qur'anic readings from sunset till sunrise. Readers of the Qur'an would move from one house to the next, and their voices would resound with a rich timbre that could not be further away from the distorted sounds one hears today, amplified over microphones and loudspeakers, a cacophony possessing neither rhythm nor cadence.

Ramadan. In my mind it will always be linked to lively evenings, enjoyable conversations, pleasant gatherings and Qur'anic readings that refreshed and enriched my life.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Sid-Ahmed.



The Press This Week

By Gajal Nassar

THE PALESTINIAN elections continued to occupy pride of place in Egyptian press commentary this week. Most commentators felt that the elections were a real start towards the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

On Saturday Abda Mubasher wrote a commentary in *Al-Ahram*, entitled "And the Palestinian reply came", in which he said that the election results negated the claims of opponents of peace both Palestinian and non-Palestinian: "In light of the election results, it is not acceptable that anyone should cast doubt on the Palestinian people's stance on peace or on the leadership of Yasser Arafat. Over the last few years, and the last year in particular, there have been intensive attacks on the man, his vision and performance to the extent of accusing him of treason. Yet the Palestinians have chosen him as their president and this is the reply to all the accusations levelled against him."

In his column in *Al-Ahram*, Salah Montasser wrote on Saturday predicting a new wave of attacks against Arafat in the coming days: "Talk will reach a crescendo in the coming few days over the cancellation of the article pertaining to the destruction of Israel in the Palestinian national charter. In order to delete the article, Arafat needs the approval of two-thirds of the Palestinian National Council. It is not logical that two parties should negotiate peaceful coexistence when one party is committed in writing to destroying the other. But who says that logic plays any part

in this on-going conflict?" Also on Saturday in *Al-Ahram*, Ahmed Nafie wrote a long article on the results of the elections and their potential effects on negotiations with the Israelis. He said in part: "The Palestinian voter has gone to the polling booths fully understanding the meaning of these elections. The elected council, whose members automatically become members of the Palestinian National Council, will join the elected president in holding the final stage of talks scheduled for next May. The council will also contribute to laying the basis for the creation of the Palestinian state."

"One of the council's first acts will be to put forward the question of Jerusalem and encourage the trend that the holy city should become the joint capital of both Palestine and Israel. In other words East Jerusalem should become the capital of Palestine while West Jerusalem should become the capital of Israel. Other actions will involve outstanding issues such as refugee rights, the removal of Israeli settlements and ownership of land and water. In addition there is the question of internal security, which will gain in importance in the coming phase, for the sake of stability during the final status talks."

In his weekly article in October magazine, Editor-in-Chief Ragab El-Banna wrote: "Yasser Arafat has become the

elected President of the Palestinian National Authority. The Palestinians now have an elected council for self-rule, ministers, police and an administrative machinery. It is not definite proof that the Palestinian people are exercising their political rights and that they are now a nation with land and a governing authority."

Those who opposed the Oslo accord and branded it treason, setting themselves up as the only true nationalists, do they not now realise that they have miscalculated? Do they not feel shame for levelling accusations at those making history? Is this not the moment to remember Anwar El-Sadat, the maker of history, who endured abuse and the stupidity of minds unable to comprehend the truth?"

In Saturday's *Al-Ahram*, Ihsan Bakr wrote an article inquiring whether the elections mark a new phase in which a Palestinian state is established, or merely a one in which Israeli domination changes forms.

He said in part: "With all the popular support he has received, Yasser Arafat can now wage the difficult battle ahead. Arafat has succeeded in leading his people over the past 30 years and we hope that he will now lay the basis for the independent state which every-one dreams of. We do not wish to see the elections become a dividing line, merely highlighting the end of a phase of Israeli domination, and the start of another. We think it is a difficult task but believe that with the support of his people Arafat can overcome all difficulties."

Mariam Rubin wrote in *Oc-*

tober magazine on Sunday: "Despite various Palestinian opinions on the role of the legislative council and its efficacy, what these elections have shown is the end of an era full of pain and the beginning of another full of hope and anticipation. After the elections, the PNA has changed from a revolutionary leadership to a legal one. It has moved from revolution to state. The make-up of this state has been completed by the presence of a legislative authority vested in the legislative council and an executive authority represented by the elected head of the PNA and his ministers, as well as the independent judiciary."

In the Thursday edition of *Al-Wafd*, daily mouthpiece of the liberal Wafd Party, Abdel-Aziz Mohamed wrote an article, entitled "A Nation rises from the first", arguing that what has taken place lays the basis for a Palestinian state. "The Palestinian people have put in place the cornerstone for their state and proceeded along a path that could be arduous and long, but which in the flicker of an eye is transforming them into a nation? There is not one nation in our region which has not undergone a similar transformation. Egypt in 1922 gained a restricted independence which left it in a state of self-rule only. The commander of the army in those days was British and so was the commander of the police. In every ministry there was a British adviser who was in reality the minister. And even in the judiciary there were foreign judges. There were restrictions on the parliament's powers. It was the same with Jordan, Iraq

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In *Al-Masra'at* magazine the editorial writer Mahmoud El-Saadani wrote an article entitled, "Congratulations, Arafat" in which he said: "Congratulations to Yasser Arafat who fulfilled most of his dreams but who still has a long road ahead of him to fulfil the rest of his dreams, namely a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. If the Palestinian state is Arafat's responsibility, East Jerusalem is the responsibility of the Arab states and Islamic nations in general. They should all stand as one man and assert that there can be no normalisation with Israel or trade relations or free markets or tourism or any form of cooperation unless Jerusalem comes under Arab sovereignty."

In an obvious crack at the expense of Jordan's King Hussein, El-Saadani goes on: "A certain someone might ask how can this be achieved after he has bolstered his relations with Israel and striven to establish free areas and tourism beaches and international airports? And this, in addition to the creation of a new Middle East pact between Jordan, Israel, Turkey and Iraq after a coup d'état in Baghdad?"

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A Palestinian state

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مركز الإعلام

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Dreams and nightmares

Irrespective of objections raised by those Palestinian factions opposed to the Oslo agreements, the outcome of the recent elections in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip indicates that the majority of the Palestinian people are determined to pursue the path of peace.

When President Yasser Arafat met with President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo following the elections, he was visibly more confident and relaxed than on earlier occasions. His manner and expression served to confirm that the first seeds of statehood had been sown. His election as head of the Palestinian Authority, combined with the election of the legislative council, was tantamount to a vote of confidence in the viability of self rule. For Arafat the result of the vote constitutes a green light, signalling that he should go on in his attempts to capitalise on the benefits that have accrued as a result of past struggles. In the next two to three years, then, we can surmise that Mr Arafat will expect to see a change in his position. He will not remain forever the president of the Palestinian National Authority. Sooner, rather than later, he will be president of the state of Palestine.

Arafat, as he remarked recently in the presence of Shimon Peres, has every right to dream. Unfortunately for Peres Arafat's dreams may appear less a reality than a nightmare. Nonetheless, there can be little doubting that, however badly the Israeli prime minister sleeps, the seeds of Palestinian statehood have begun to germinate. It is also likely that they will not take long to flower.

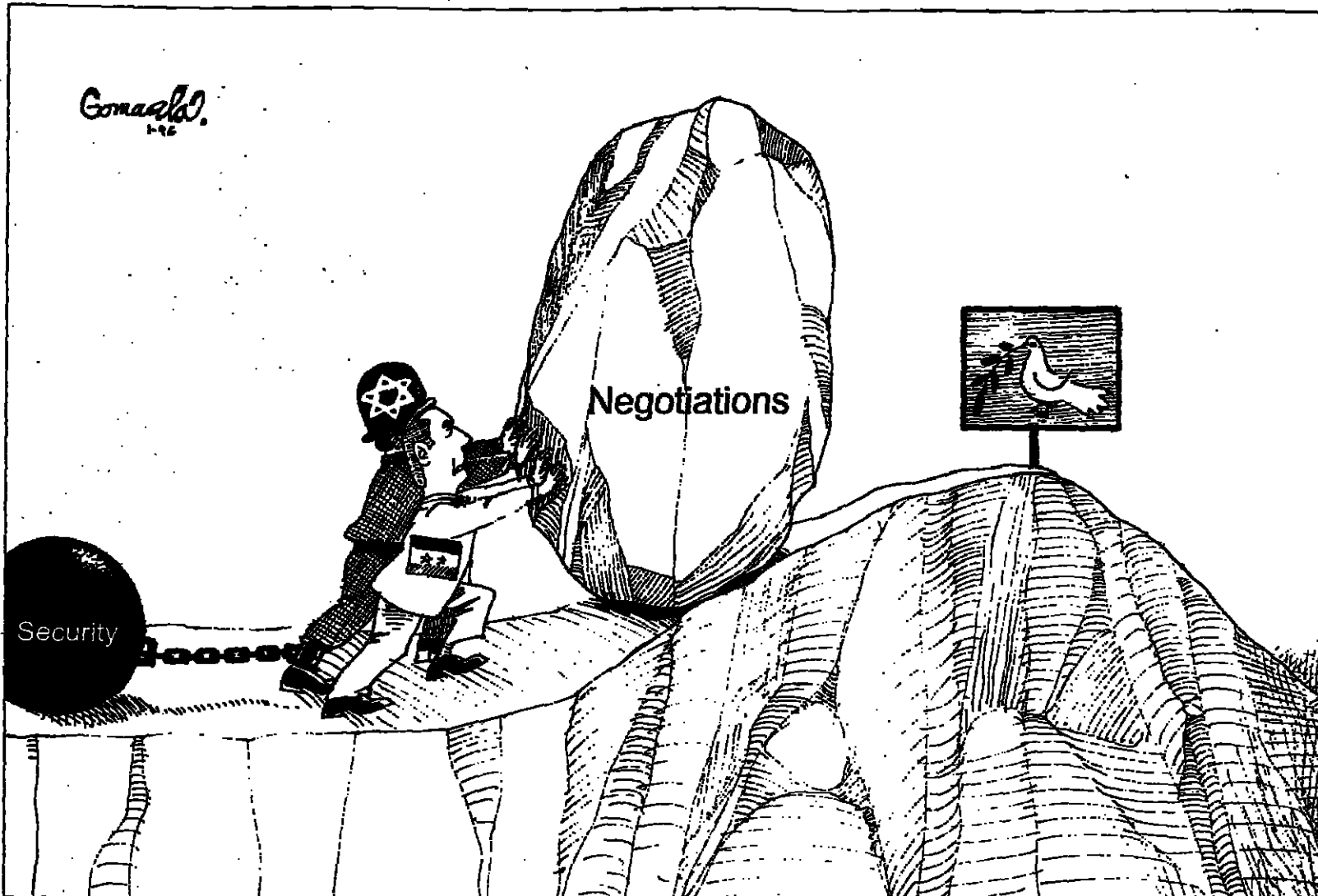
In his recent address to a gathering of writers and journalists in Cairo, attended by Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, Arafat appeared confident that those Palestinian groups that had opposed the Oslo agreements had undergone a radical change. A new Palestinian reality would, Arafat insisted, emerge. And it would emerge in such a manner as to 'impose itself' on those Israeli extremists who appear incapable of realising that Gaza and Jericho are not, as Begin and Shamir used to assert, Judea and Samaria.

Arafat, though entitled to his dreams, also realises that the road ahead will not be without obstacles. And first among the hurdles he will have to negotiate are Israeli demands for a change in the Palestinian National Charter involving the dropping of articles that call for the destruction of Israel. Arafat maintains that such a change is no more than a formality given that the terms embodied in the Oslo agreements represent a legal and practical omission of all articles in the Palestinian National Charter to which the Israelis object.

Today Israelis and Palestinians recognise one another in an unprecedented manner. Such recognition is backed by international agreements that are in turn supported by the world's powers. Recognition, then, is no longer an issue. What is an issue though is whether the articles are dropped before Israel fulfils its commitments over withdrawal, redeployment, the release of prisoners, the return of leaders, and the commencement of the final stage of negotiations.

While insisting on the removal of articles it finds offensive in the charter, Israel continues to build Jewish settlements on the Occupied Territories. Recent reports indicate that the Israeli housing minister is seeking to build settlements to house Jewish extremists in the West Bank, near Ramallah, at precisely the moment that final status negotiations have arrived on the agenda. Such negotiations will, of course, address the question of clearing settlements in the Occupied Territories.

Such reports can only indicate that Israel remains uncommitted to establishing a final peace with the Palestinians and that, if negotiations have been fraught with difficulties till now, such difficulties will appear as nothing when compared to those that will be encountered during the final status negotiations. Within such a scenario it is imperative that we stress — as Amr Moussa recently has — that from an Arab standpoint comprehensive peace can only materialise if the Palestinians are allowed to exercise their right to self-determination through the emergence of a Palestinian state.



The truth behind the words

Practicalities, as evinced on the ground, have dictated the peace process up to the Palestinian elections, rather than the words of treaties. And they will continue to do so, argues **Lutfi El-Kholi**

In spite of the continued Israeli blockade of the area subject to the Palestinian Authority, as defined by the directly negotiated Palestinian-Israeli peace settlement, the Palestinian inhabitants of this territory have at last been able to create a new reality through organising executive and legislative elections. They have, in short, taken the first practical steps toward building an independent state.

How can this have happened given that the Oslo agreement, which provided the context for last week's elections, makes no reference whatsoever to such an entity?

It has happened, of course, as a result of an ongoing process, the impetus for which has been furnished by the Palestinian people themselves. As early as 1974 the Palestinian National Council announced that it would establish a national authority on any territory liberated from the occupying forces.

The Oslo agreement and its appendices necessarily contain a number of mechanisms that could act to bring such an entity into being. One such is the provision stipulating the holding of elections in order to establish the organisational structures of a Palestinian Authority founded upon the will of the people. In accepting this provision the Israelis perforce accepted the principle that it is the people who constitute the sole source of authority in a society and nation, and only the representatives of the people can be legitimately empowered to fulfil the obligations of international agreements.

It is in Israel's interests that the Palestinian National Authority, with whom it will share

the responsibility of implementing agreements, should have credibility, stability and power, not only endorsed by popular support but sanctioned by international law and legitimised by a credible constitutional edifice. In other words Israel wanted to ensure, before embarking on negotiations for a final settlement, that its Palestinian counterpart would be a fully competent, functioning entity, capable of entering the final phase of negotiations with popular support and international backing. Elections were the only means of guaranteeing this.

It is also in Israel's interests that the National Authority, whose executive and legislative representatives were elected by the Palestinian people, comes to enjoy responsibility and acceptance not just locally but on a regional and international level. Given this need Israel had little choice but to allow international and regional observers to monitor the conduct and integrity of the elections. Yet the vast number of international observers simply served to underwrite the enormous importance that the international community attached to these elections.

No one could deny that there has been a radical alteration in the character of the Palestinian party between 1993, when it signed the Oslo agreement with Israel, and now. The Palestinians are no longer "just the PLO". The Palestinians are now represented by a national political authority elected by the people within a framework recognised as legitimate both within and outside the region.

Like many earlier events in the history of the Palestinian liberation movement, the re-

sult of the elections have revealed that there is no real alternative to a peaceful, negotiated settlement. Yet the seeming narrowness of the text belies the extent of manoeuvrability it allows both sides in implementing its articles on the ground. Necessity, always the mother of invention, certainly fosters a creative interpretation of the written word.

Israel, faced with demands of the primary and transitional phases of the agreement, tried — perhaps still trying — to bend the texts to its needs. Israel early announced that it would not be able to fulfil its obligations according to the schedule specified in the agreement because the dates did not respect religious considerations. Then it quibbled about the quantity and quality of the Palestinian police force, the withdrawal and redeployment of Israeli armed forces and the size and definition of the areas that would be subject to autonomous rule. Yet despite all this prevarication, Israel soon found itself caught between the practical need for a peaceful settlement and its opposing desire to restrict the actual scope and efficacy of the written agreement. It had to opt for one thing or the other; it had to choose between abandoning the peace process or proceeding to translate the real need for a settlement into some practical measures. Israel — or rather the Labour government — after some hesitation opted for the latter course.

The Palestinians too have opted to follow the same course, choosing to deal with thorny issues practically. When, for example, the Palestinians were faced with objections, supported by the US, to independent Pal-

estinian representation at the conference they bowed to exigency and accepted to join the Jordanians as a single team. Later, when the opportunity to conduct closed direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations arose the Palestinians agreed that their negotiators would not be official representatives of the PLO. Yet once the negotiations led to an agreement it was signed in the name of the PLO. And it was the PLO leadership who entered the autonomous territories, exercising national functions in a realistic spirit.

By the time of the elections the leadership of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories had already participated in the complex process of adapting the written text to their practical needs. They had also realised that active participation in the elections would help create other new realities that would further the cause of an independent state.

The elections themselves are indicative of the positive spirit that currently pervades. Voter turnout was extremely high, in spite of calls for a boycott and other impediments. In the West Bank and Gaza respectively, 75 and 85 per cent of the registered voters turned out to cast their ballots. Virtually unanimous support — 88 per cent of the votes — went to Yasser Arafat, senior representative of the Palestinian leadership which, after more than 30 continuous years of national struggle, had had the courage to brave the risks of a political settlement amidst a rapidly changing world. Fatah, the paramilitary branch which launched the Palestinian revolution in 1965 and which remained the backbone of the PLO

and the Intifada, won 66 out of the 88 seats on the legislative council. That the elections were monitored by a large team of international observers adds weight to these impressive results.

The implications are enormous. In their first freely conducted exercise of autonomy the Palestinian people have demonstrated their overwhelming support for the settlement. They have confirmed the legitimacy of Fatah's historic struggle, from its very beginnings to the moment citizens of the West Bank and Gaza flocked to the voting booths in order to elect their first legislative assembly and leader of the National Authority. And having done so they have created the appropriate climate for the objective realisation of self determination, via the negotiations for the final settlement, in spite of all the restrictions — in some cases ambiguity — of the written agreement. At the same time a legislative power has been created that is capable of directing and monitoring the executive branch of the National Authority.

These elections have confirmed the principle of plurality. There is scope for conflict between the executive and opposition, though such conflict will be regulated by the legislative council in a manner that does not detract from the democratic operation of the new system and does not obstruct the tasks necessary in building a nation.

Much has yet to be done, but the real battle is on the ground. It is no longer fought in terms of heavy rhetoric. No one has their head in the clouds. Feet are firmly planted on the ground.

Soapbox

A growing theocracy

The Egyptian state is not a secular state and the conflict between the state and the Islamist trend consists, essentially, of a struggle as to who should exercise hegemony.

Take the constitution, the second article of which stipulates Islamic *shari'a* as the main source of legislation. The authority referred to in ascertaining the compatibility of new laws with the ordinances of *shari'a* has become none other than the state's religious institutions, especially Al-Azhar. This means that it is the latter which exercises censorious power over the People's Assembly — a situation which violates the most important principle of any secular, democratic state.

Hardly surprising, then, to find that the state regularly resorts to men of religion to justify its policies. For instance, in order to justify amendments to the agrarian reform laws, the government sought a ruling from the Sheikh of Al-Azhar invalidating certain clauses on the grounds of their incompatibility with *shari'a*. The same process happened with the draft of the new housing law. *Shari'a* was cited as the justification for the amendments which will allow the owners of buildings to evict longstanding tenants.

Religious institutions now exercise an unprecedented level of power, a recent example was the case with which Al-Azhar aborted attempts to legally prohibit female circumcision.

Similarly, following the outcry that surrounded the resort to *husha* in an attempt to forcibly divorce a university professor from his wife, the Ministry of Justice has formulated a draft law that must be like *mana* from heaven to even the most ardent Islamist. Instead of banning *husha* and so mitigating the damage that can be done by its wanton application, the new draft law generalises the device and enshrines the right of every citizen to resort to it.

This week's Soapbox speaker is a professor of law at Ain Shams University, and former professor at the UN University in Tokyo.



Hossam Issa

Palestine: transition and transformation

James Zogby, having acted as "international observer" in the recent Palestinian elections, hails them as a second Intifada, a transforming event in Palestinian history, and the first step towards full statehood

I was an international monitor observing the 20 January Palestinian elections. On election day I covered over two dozen polling stations in the Khan Yunis district of Gaza. It was one of the most remarkable and moving events I have ever had the privilege to witness. So many people and scenes left strong impressions on me. Here is one:

At each poll we were asked to observe whether election laws were being violated. One such law provided that an illiterate voter could ask for and receive assistance from someone else, but a literate person could assist only three such illiterate voters. At one poll I observed a small girl assisting an older woman with her ballot. A few minutes later I saw the same girl assisting an even older woman. After another few minutes I saw the same girl helping a man. At that point I felt I should speak to her.

I asked her age. She was 12. I asked what she was doing. She replied that since she was the only member of her entire family who could read, her parents had asked her to accompany them to the polls to help them vote. She was proud of her accomplishments, as her parents were proud that they had an opportunity to vote.

The recent Palestinian elections were significant for the profound impact they had on internal Palestinian politics. They were, in a real sense, a second Palestinian Intifada, a psychologically self-liberating and politically transforming event.

While some observers and commentators have looked only at the outcome of the elections, it is most important to note the social dynamism of the process. The elections have created a new and well-deserved self-confidence among the Palestinian officials and bureaucrats who implemented them. From a technical perspective, the elections were a marvel. In less than one month, 7,000 teachers were recruited and organised in teams to register voters. In a comprehensive sweep of the West Bank and Gaza, over 1,000,000 Palestinians were registered — over 95 per cent of all those eligible to vote!

Within the same short time, the Palestinian election teams were able to establish the procedures and laws governing the campaign period and the election itself. They also managed to demarcate the electoral districts and polling stations, and train the teams which would supervise the voting and count the ballots. These enormous challenges were met in so short a period of time because in every instance Palestinians were forced to react to an external factor: the negotiations with the Israelis were an intrusive prerequisite.

Many of the objections that have been raised regarding the process leading up to the election are unfairly placed at the doorstep of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). It is true, for example, that Palestinian election officials made changes at what appeared to be the last minute — but in many instances they were responding to the negotiating process which imposed conditions and timetables on the entire electoral process.

Although the conduct of the elections was largely free, they were still not free elections in the sense that Palestinians are not yet a free people. In fact, this may have been the first election of its kind: a free election among a people who still lack sovereignty and live encircled by military occupation. Thus, many aspects of these elections were distorted by continuing Israeli domination which imposed limits on Palestinian freedoms and necessitated compromises which the Palestinians were forced to accept

in order to have the elections in the first place.

Some issues can be best understood when seen in this context: take, for example, the complaint that candidates did not receive equal time on Palestinian television and radio. Since the PNA was only able to secure the right to operate one national radio and one national television station during the hard-fought negotiations with Israel, it is difficult to see how all of 678 candidates could have received equal coverage on the available outlets. As it was, the voice of Palestinian radio made available two free minutes for all candidates. That itself took up too many hours of not very interesting air time. The Palestinian television station has been criticised for showing too much of Yasser Arafat and not enough of his challenger, Samiha Khalil. A closer examination of the coverage reveals that it was not Arafat the candidate but Arafat the PLO Chairman and PNA President presiding over celebrations in the newly liberated cities of Jenin, Tulkarem, Nablus, Ramallah, and others. These were, in fact, historic events, making their coverage a legitimate editorial decision. To criticise this would be the same as criticising the US media for focusing so much attention during December and January on President Clinton and Senate Majority leader Bob Dole, despite the fact that the coverage was of their critical negotiations over the 1996 budget and not of their 1996 presidential campaigns.

Despite these difficulties and distortions in the election process resulting from the fact that Palestinians could not freely set up their system in their own time frame and in a manner which would fully meet their needs — the remarkable thing is that Palestinians embraced this process, performed the burdensome task of making it work, and created a system that ran as efficiently as any most observers had seen.

If the technical aspects of the elections were noteworthy, so too were the political aspects of the process. It was transformative. Palestinian society was profoundly affected.

In the beginning of the process, Fatah activists announced their slates of candidates, many of whom had been leaders of the Intifada. The central leadership of the Fatah rejected many of these candidates and sought to balance the slates by adding leading businessmen, members of prominent families and other members of the Fatah leadership who had returned to Palestine from abroad.

What was significant was that the Fatah activists struck from the lists and others who had not made the list of the central leadership decided to run anyway. As any American party leader would note, Fatah did what party leaders always do — attempt to create balance and appeal to diverse constituencies. The independents also did the right thing by challenging their leadership. This open and free challenge is the best guarantee of democracy in practice. The fact that so many of these challengers won on 20 January is evidence that the process was open and provided voters with an opportunity to choose their own representatives.

Not only Fatah but also Hamas and the Popular Front were affected by the elections. At one point the leadership of Hamas and the PFLP from within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip decided to run for the Council and support the elections. In the end, however, they were forced by their outside leadership to withdraw their candidates. Nevertheless, the inside Hamas leadership actually did encourage supporters to vote. The fact that there was a 90 per cent turnout in some of the Hamas-dominated areas of Gaza makes it clear that they understood the importance of their constituents placed in the entire process and, therefore, the need to establish independence from their outside leadership.

In all of these instances, the leading Palestinian movements were affected by the election process. As a result, many observers now expect further changes: the transformation of these movements into political parties, greater assertiveness and independence exercised by the leadership inside Palestine; and the creation of new political formations by blocs of newly-elected Council members.

Not only were the political groups changed by the election process, but the candidates themselves were transformed by the act of campaigning. For three intense weeks every *diwan* (government office), every social gathering, every city street was the scene of intense political discussions. The act of going directly to tens of thousands of people — seeking support, debating issues, convincing voters of one's own programme and qualifications — in the end these actions not only invest candidates in the process of election but sensitises them to the concerns of those whose support they seek. It was not difficult to observe how many of the candidates had changed over the three weeks of campaigning: they spoke more aggressively about their ideas and programmes, regardless of whatever positions they may have formerly held (whether they had been Ministers of the PNA or opponents); they uniformly condemned corruption and spoke of reform and democracy; and all were eager to take visitors to meet their constituents — their new source of affirmation and authority.

Even the physical landscape of Palestine changed. In the past, the walls of some streets were covered with slogans and posters. The slogans were protests and the posters were pictures of martyrs. Today's banners and slogans are campaign pledges and exhortations, and the faces are of candidates who hope to be leaders of the future Palestine Council.

With all of these many levels of changes, the people of the West Bank and Gaza also became transformed and energised — the best evidence of which was the massive showing on election day: almost 800,000 turned out to vote, despite real hardships. In Jerusalem there was intimidation and risk as hundreds of Israeli military personnel checked identifications, harassed, and given arrested potential voters. In Hebron too, there were taunts from right wing settlers and a fear of violent disturbances. Many travelled long distances and, in many instances, waited

hours to cast their ballots.

In one polling place in the Khan Yunis area of Gaza, 1,600 voters (over three-quarters of whom were illiterate) came to that one location to vote. Many arrived at 7:00 in the morning and were still waiting to vote by 4:00 in the afternoon. The overwhelming response was too much for the small group of election officers running the poll. Because so many voters were illiterate, it took even longer for them to cast ballots. That poll, like some others, stayed open until 11:30 at night so that the crowds that had been waiting for their right to vote would not have to be disappointed. At this particular polling station, four officers stayed at work for more than 16 hours, checking lists and collecting ballots, and then returned after a short break to sort and count 1,600 ballots that had been cast. This level of commitment and public service was in evidence throughout the West Bank and Gaza on election day.

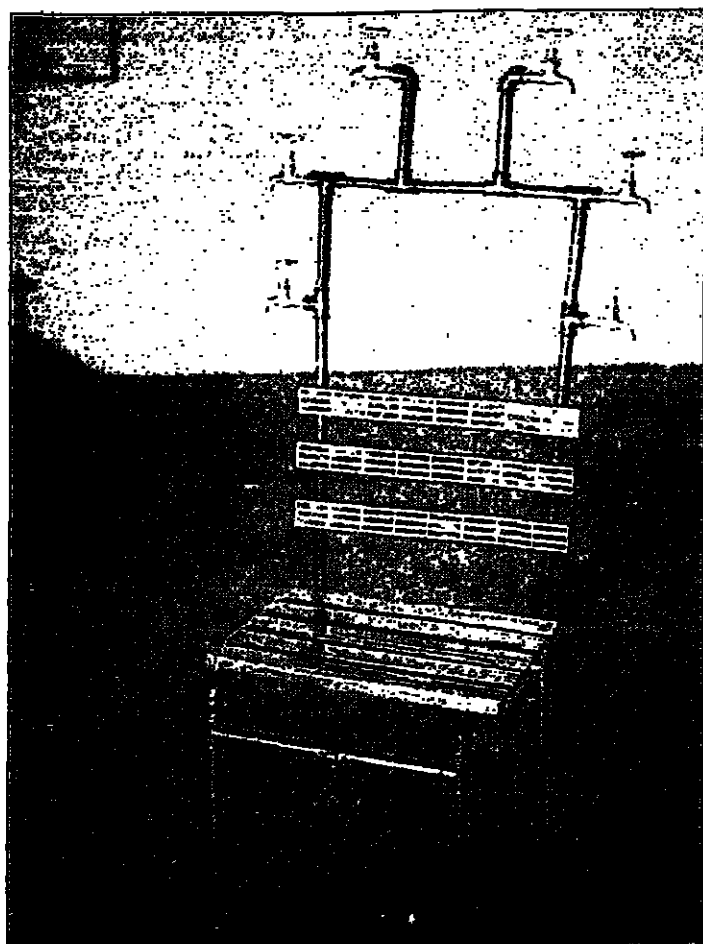
Were the elections fair? From the observation of most monitors, the answer is decidedly yes. Were there irregularities? Of course there were: but many alleged irregularities turned out to be rumour and could not be substantiated. Some others were true but, having participated in and observed elections throughout the US over the last 30 years, I can honestly say that I saw nothing in Gaza that I had not seen in Philadelphia, Chicago, New York and Detroit and this despite our 200-year experience with democracy. This is not to excuse such behaviour; but rather to simply put irregularities into context. Overall, the elections were free and fair — and the questionable behaviour was minimal.

Even in the circumstance of lacking real sovereignty (resulting in either direct Israeli interference in the case of Jerusalem and Hebron or indirect interference, as in drawn out negotiations and other restrictions placed on free Palestinian movement, expression and assembly), of the shortness of the time given to organise the elections and train the management teams to run them, and the difficulties presented in some areas by illiteracy and traditionalism — Palestinians overwhelmingly embraced the process and made it work.

The entire election process produced a transformation in Palestinian politics. The election of a new Council has created a new leadership forum for emerging Palestinian national leaders and for new Palestinian political programmes. The process has also yielded a body of leaders who must be responsive to those who chose them, and who will impose a greater degree of accountability in governance. It is this body that will now have the responsibility of protecting the rights of those who elected them: providing a check on arbitrary arrests like those that marred the pre-election period; overseeing the decision-making process; and working with the Executive Branch to provide legislation to govern the daily affairs of Palestine. It is this body, in the years to come, that with the newly-elected Palestinian President will proclaim a Palestinian state in Palestine.

Palestinians may not yet be free or have sovereignty over the land of Palestine. But they have the fruits of a democratic process, which will now be developed and institutionalised. A great deal remains to be done, but 20 January marked a giant step in the right direction.

The writer is director of the Washington-based Arab-American Institute.



Could you sink into Hesham Nawar's Narcissus, above, Said Kamel's sci-fi retro fantasy, right, or Fatma El-Tanani's hands and feet, below?

Seating plans

Ever since Mies van der Rohe folded a Mondrian into a celebratedly uncomfortable chair, chairs have never been just chairs. Perhaps the process started earlier, with the Arts and Crafts Movement, with William Morris and Co., with Japanese and Oscar Wilde's famous quip that he would try to live up to his blue china. Maybe chairs have always been accessories rather than objects upon which to sit, soft or hard sculpture rather than utilitarian household items. The great secret of Charles René Mackintosh — the most coveted of twentieth century chairists — has always been the absolute impracticality of his furniture, those endless ladder-backs ascending to heaven but hardly supportive of the back. Examine any piece of Mackintosh — the original and not a smart shop copy — and despite its ultra modern lines the first thing that strikes you is just how badly made it is. Not only would it damage your health to sit on this chair, if you did sit on it it could well fall to pieces.

Chair Meetings — Design, drawing, realisation of chairs by Egyptian artists — currently occupies the Mashrabiya Gallery. It is less an attempt to impose the chair as art object on our sitting rooms than to promote the humble chair into an object fit to occupy gallery space. It is an extension of the approach followed with messianic zeal in the early days of the design group Memphis, whose chewing gum pink formica was never intended to occupy anything so humble as the home. And so we have this exhibition, based on the invitation to a group of artists to realise that most basic of humanity's needs, something to sit on.

But what to do with a chair? It could, of course, be anthropomorphised. Chairs have arms, legs, feet and backs. So too people. That something to sit on could be transformed into an even more basic need — to sit on someone — has not been lost to the artists exhibiting in this exhibition. Fatma El-Tanani gives her Pharaonic chair human feet and hands. Yasser Grab has Manise cutouts supporting both the seat and back of his

Nigel Ryan on where to sit

chair. Nazeh Rashed opts for a slightly more loaded confusion between thing and person, in a rusticated version of (Alan Jones?) sixties fetishised rubber clad mannequins, carving bits of untreated wood into the shape of naked gymnasts who are, quite patiently, performing for their sitters' private pleasure. Good design is surprisingly absent. A great many of these chairs cannot really be sat on. Some time ago I visited Chant Avdeyev, shortly after he had returned from a trip to China. In an empty room I was asked if I would like a chair. I said yes, and a small wooden box, the size of a brick, was promptly brought. Despite my best efforts I could not sit on it, so ended kneeling on the rug, pretending my bottom was on the box when in fact it hovered several inches above. That same box is in this exhibition, and I defy any visitor to sit on it comfortably.

This, of course, is not the case with all the exhibits though some, such as Adel El-Sawi's designs, that look bottom friendly, are not. Others, such as Said Kamel's retro sci-fi construction made of bits of scrap metal and machinery parts, are surprisingly comfortable. Indeed, in the little questionnaire handed to visitors to the exhibition, Said Kamel got my vote as the most comfortable. It also smells of a mechanic's shop, which is, I suppose, because it is constructed largely from cogs and chains. It would be a stunner in any sitting room.

Naturally the Mackintosh influence runs deep. There are high backs and a



great deal of matt black metalwork. Salam Saleh's two precarious constructions drag the Scottish designer through secessionist Vienna and onto Cairo. (One has a pyramidal base, both have designs painted on the wooden seats as do chairs in coffee shops.) But for the real Cairo, Khan Al-Khalili experience you cannot do better than pause, for a moment or two, in Esmat Dawastashi's chair sculpture, constructed from bits of shisha, dominoes, chess pieces, and that great exclamation of ersatz ethnicity, the scrap of Bedouin rug made into a cushion. A composite souvenir for which you do not have to hunt — a kind of one man Oriental café.

Then there is the striving after a less obviously ersatz authenticity — Hesham El-Zein's sugar cane stool which combines rustic simplicity with discomfort. There is pure whimsy in Mah-

moud El-Aswani's split cane chair that rocks on the carved effigy of a sacred crocodile. Ancient god in perpetual motion.

Some of these chairs are very clever. Hesham Nawar takes the accessories of the modern bathroom — mirrored tiles, bright blue paintwork and fashionable brass taps, to turn his chair into a shrine to personal grooming. It is, perhaps inevitably, called Narcissus. 'Some artists, though, will always be themselves. Gamal Abdel-Nasser produces the ugliest exhibit, a found frame with papier maché and plaster extremities painted in clashing shades of pink, green, yellow and violet. It too has feet: very ugly feet, one supposes, are cased in the ugly red shoes that project from unsavoury plaster legs.

In staging an exhibition such as this there is always the possibility that the artists will simply stick what they normally do onto a chair they found in the cupboard, which appears to be precisely what Mohamed Fathi Aboul-Naga decided to do, covering the seat and back of a standard frame chair with fibrous, handmade paper. The frame, predictably, was painted matt black. Omar El-Fayoumi does the same, with greater success. In the matt black frame that forms the back of his chair are small iconic portraits, brightly coloured funeral faces. The seat is a veritable window box.

A salutary reminder. Forget Hillhouse and his other successes. Charles René Mackintosh's final commission was from a young couple who wanted their apartment in Chelsea, London, to be given a complete overhaul. They entrusted the job to the Scottish genius. He produced a stunning interior, in black and white. It makes for beautiful photographs. But you cannot imagine living in it. The couple moved back into their extravagantly refurbished house and stayed for a week. Then they moved out. A year later they were divorced and Mackintosh had died in poverty. One glance at the Zebra Bedroom and you know why.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

To The Oriental Sources of La Fontaine
French Cultural Centre, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St. Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824. Daily 10am-3pm & 7pm-9pm. Until 15 Feb.

Ossama Mohamed (Glass-work) and Ahmed Amawi (Calligraphy)
Exara Gallery, 3 Al-Nessim St. Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 11.30am-2pm & 8.30pm-11pm. Until 17 Feb.

Chairs
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St. Downtown. Tel 778 823. Daily exc Fri 11am-8pm. Until 18 Feb.

Ramadanant
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St. Mohandessin. Tel 346 3342. Daily exc Fri 10am-2.30pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 18 Feb.

Works by Elhamy Naguib, Abdel-Fattah El-Badri, Esmat Dawastashi, Fares Ahmed, Farouk Wagdi, Mohamed Ibrahim, Mohamed El-Tahan and Mohamed Youssef.

Alberto Barri
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St. Mohandessin. Tel 346 3342. Daily exc Fri 10am-2.30pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 18 Feb.

Alfred Stieglitz (Photographs)
Sory Gallery, AUC, Al-Shethi Rihan St. Tel 357 5422. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 29 Feb.

An exhibition of work by Alfred Stieglitz, celebrated American photographer. Stieglitz pioneered the use of cameras in the snow and rain; the first to photograph skyscrapers, clouds and airplanes; and was one of the pioneers of colour photography.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
Kafour Al-Akhdid St. Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm. Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Manet and Rodin.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq. Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily 9am-2pm. An outstanding collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures and the controversial mummies' room.

Coptic Museum
Main Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-3.30pm; Fri 9am-11am, 1pm-3.30pm. Founded in 1910, the museum houses the finest and largest collection of Coptic art and artefacts in the world.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St. Ahmed Maher St. Bab Al-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-3.30pm; Fri 9am-11am, 1pm-3.30pm.

A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including mashrabiya, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork and coins, drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods and other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6841. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-8pm. A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt, from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Chateau Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Gundi St. Giza. A museum devoted to the

paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1950).

Mahmoud Makhtar Museum
Tahrir St. Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm. A permanent collection of work by the sculptor, Mahmoud Makhtar (d 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr Al-Nil Bridge.

FILMS

French Films
French Cultural Centre, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St. Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824.

Spanish Films
Spanish Cultural Centre, 20 Adly St branch, Kodak passage. Tel 360 1743.

Cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.

Nine Months
Cairo Sheraton, Galaa St. Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 1.30pm, 8.30pm & 11pm. Al-Salam. 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St. Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 1pm, 8pm & 11pm.

Waterworld
Karin II, 15 Enadaddin St. Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 11am, 1.30pm, 8pm & 11pm.

Toyour Al-Zahra (Birds of the Dark)
Diana, 17 Al-Ahli St. Enadaddin. Tel 924 727. Daily 2pm, 8pm & 10pm.

Esmat's Hazzat 'Arsh Miar (The Woman Who Shook Egypt's Throne)
Lido, 23 Enadaddin St. Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 2pm, 8pm & 10pm.

RAMADAN MINI-FILM FESTIVAL

Al-Haram, Al-Haram St. Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily midnight.
Thur, 1 Feb: Black Vengeance
Fri, 2 Feb: Indecent Proposal
Sat, 3 Feb: Forest Gump
Sun, 4 Feb: The Flintstones
Karin, 15 Enadaddin St. Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily midnight.
Thur, 1 Feb: Disclosure
Fri, 2 Feb: Interview With The Vampire
Sat, 3 Feb: Just Cause
Sun, 4 Feb: The Specialist
Cosmos, 12 Enadaddin St. Downtown. Tel 574 2177. Daily midnight.
Thur, 1 Feb: On Deadly Ground
Fri, 2 Feb: Death Angel
Sat, 3 Feb: Only You
Sun, 4 Feb: Stargate

THEATRE

Al-Sahera (The Sorceress)
National Theatre, Al-Alaba. Tel 579 1778. Daily 9pm.

Al-Ganzir (The Chain)
Karin II, Qasr Al-Ahli St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.

Mess' Ya Mess' (Good Evening, Egypt)
Mohamed Farid, Enadaddin. Tel 776 050. Daily 9pm, Fri 7pm.

Starring Mohamed Mounir, Sawwan Badr, Mohamed Awad.

Dastour Ya Shadid (With Your Permission, Masters)
Al-Fann, Ramessy St. Tel 578 2444. Daily exc Mon, 9.30pm.

A man pays dearly for running against the president in the elections. Play by Mahmoud El-Toukhi, directed by Gail El-Sharkawi, starring Ahmed Bedeir and Nezarine El-Fiqi.

Al-Za'im (The Leader)
Al-Haram, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily exc Tues, 9.30pm. Mon & Fri 8pm. Starring Adel Ismail in a play scripted by Farouk Sabri.

Mama America
Qasr Al-Nil, Qasr Al-Nil St. Tahrir. Tel 575 0761. Daily exc Tues, 12.30pm, 2.30pm, 10.30pm, Mon 8pm. With Mohamed Sobhi, director and lead actor, in a socio-political allegory written by Mahdi Youssef.

Ya Nas Effhamou (Try to Understand, People)
Floating Theatre, Fatma Rushdi St. Tel 363 8783. Daily 9.30pm. Starring Emad Rashad, Dina Abdallah and Hassan Kani.

Hazzamni Ya... (The Me Up...)
Al-Gezira, Abdel-Aziz Al-Soud, Marial. Tel 364 4160. Daily 10pm, Fri 8pm. A musical involving extensive belly-dancing by Fifi Abdou. Also starring Medhat Saleh and Sherif Mounir.

National Circus
Next to the Ballroom Theatre, Al-Nil St. Corniche Al-Nil, Al-Aghasa. Tel 347 0612. Daily exc Wed, 9pm.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please telephone or send information to Listings, Al-Ahram Weekly, Galaa St. Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by Inky El-Kashaf

Music

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Great Symphonies (5); soloist violin Julia Krasko; Mustafa Nagui, conductor; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 19 January

Time is running out. The long journey in front of us is not shorted by the music-making of Mustafa Nagui. Whatever the clock says there is no speeding with him. There can be no funny business, no bursts of speed or sudden stalls. The journey will pass smoothly, which has its virtues. There are no crashes with Nagui on the bands of the road. In fact there is no road at all. Everything is in place for a straight, safe journey in an airborne accident-proof vacuum.

So at last, dust-free and bodily in one piece, we get out of our vehicle. Which one? Where have we been? Wherever it is, we have been there before. Gamal Abdel-Rahim's Variations on a Folkloric Theme is a good tune. Yet though the variations which followed are varied and new sounding, Nagui's conducting was not. There was no accent on the theme at all, nor on the variations. It is a popular piece and has been done many times before. Nagui, though, failed to make anything out of it. The changes of rhythm, key or colour, which are in the composition, were absent. Also missing were those abrupt levels of speed and colour which are one of Abdel-Rahim's main attractions. At times it is the sound of the aviary, one of the favourite spheres of Abdel-

Body, head and heart

David Blake joins the threesome

Rahim's imagination; at others, a pessimism related to Alban Berg, one of the Abdel-Rahim icons. Historic sounds now that music is into lust, bow and lonesomeness. But not Abdel-Rahim, who is more complex in his prophecies. Body language came next with Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in D major, with Julia Krasko providing the music, the brain, the brawn and the unisex surprise which in this performance doubled as the big bang. Krasko chased big things.

Since last playing here she has been going around the world, establishing herself as a forceful fiddler. Last time here she looked very discreet, schoolmarmish. This time, it was as though she had stepped straight out of the Concord Rainbow Express, a water nymph in a green and blue sequined body-stocking, shimmering like a blonde Venus or water siren born from an immaculate conception — never a pupil from violin school. It all fitted the mood she exuded, what they call now a fragrance narrative. Behind the smooth, shiny surface is a musical brain with technical power. Though Tchaikovsky wrote before the gender collapse had begun, his own construction as a musician was giving way at the seams. So even if he had conceived

this concerto as a man's work, it already shows signs of the androgynous aesthetic to come. Krasko looked like a woman but played like a man. The nymph was some bloke indeed: muscles rippled, the wonderful piece of music was given in overview — form, not fashion.

She stood upright like a water-sprite. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra covered slightly but did its best to accommodate itself to her frontal attack. We headed into the onward force of Tchaikovsky. He is always a wonder. When he really undoes himself he becomes cannibalistic. Everyone gets down to the meat. Nagui, not sure what had hit him, did his best. Krasko played on like a flying fish; she swooped and fluttered from all the elevations and depths of which the violin is capable. She went through all the stoppings and bridgings of which the human hand is capable. She unravelled the bow strings into organ-like force, wind noises and kisses with the open-mouthed awe of a child amazed at his own abilities. When the violin is managed like this, there is no need to worry about gender; it comes from the place Apollo came and he was the last one to worry about what produced his thrills. Krasko gave songs to the first movement; she also

gave them in the second, where the pyrotechnical display eased up. She did this with a breathtaking, sudden arching of her upper body before plunging into the *cadenza* — high wire dives into space. By the final *allegro* of this concerto Julia Krasko seemed to have gone, to have left the Opera House altogether. Everything was geared to a final finish. Even Mustafa Nagui was on top of the speeds she set him. Everything was geared to the final revelation of her view of the concerto. When it came it was salutary. It seemed as if she was saying: What is music anyway? Who does it? Why do it? It has nothing to do with money or fame and belongs to no one at all, not even me. It is the simplifier and the destroyer. Krasko gave what she could to achieve her revelation. What happens when it is all over? It's time to be people, ordinary we and us again. Ramon has it. Krasko was seen leaving the Opera House in tuxedo and white polo cap, as herself, as Marlene Dietrich, as her own husband, as her daughter.

There are as many ways of playing Beethoven's *Symphony No 5* as it has notes. Or perhaps only one way — from the heart. It's daunting every way. Every note of it is stamped with tradition. It is like bring-

ing up the Titanic from the floor of the Atlantic Ocean. Faced with it, do you keep your head or lose it? Do you need a head? You certainly need a mind. Be an oceanographer, plunge and drift. Beethoven does not belong to anyone but the human race. He is out of Word Land positively. Even Bach is simpler. No one can call Beethoven obese. Nagui's management at least understood that much. But there was no flesh on it either. There was skin and bone — mostly bone — down to the skeleton. It was neither romantic nor classical. It was an autopsy. Autopsies have their uses in medicine and the law.

Beethoven lived a musical life of such intensity and pressure that one hour of it would kill other composers. Pull him to bits — every phrase is still there, drenched with density. And Nagui? And this performance? Where was it? It was a peaceful run through a photograph of a lovely graveyard as landscape. Large trees swayed gracefully in the wind. The dead were beautifully dumped in earth. This is the wind-up. Life's great structure is 'o'ter. Where do we go from here? There's only one place left — heaven. If there is one thing Beethoven is not, it is peaceful. Even in heaven, he will stir up troubles — *sturm und drang*. Anyway, you do not have to go to heaven because he is a Prometheus, down here for us, into everything great or small.

Around the galleries



Sayed El-Weteli

KILIMS and glasswork by Sayed El-Weteli are on show at the Arts Centre, Zamalek. The kilims bear geometrically rendered scenes from social life in the oases and make use of folkloric motifs; the glass pieces show an innovative use of metal wires which punctuate and modulate their surfaces. Al-Shemou Gallery plays host to a group show of works by 12 Alexandrian artists. Sculptures by Tarek Zahedi are worth noting. These are in a variety of materials, the wood pieces particularly demonstrating a fine sense of the dynamics of form. Also worth looking out for are Nahas El-Shehshah's paintings which vary in spirit, from the miniature to the abstract, and which in their colour schemes have a decidedly Far Eastern feel.

Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ashri



A very Egyptian Ramadan

Tahia Abdel-Nasser provides a guide to the varied programmes offered by Cairo's cultural institutions as they negotiate a balance between the fast and the feast

In introducing Mahmoud and Hayaa Al-Istaiti and Abdel-Rehim Al-Sowayf from the Moroccan Andalusian music troupe Mohamed Salem assumed that his audience would be familiar with the Opera House's Arabian Evenings programme, which for the past four years has been a prominent feature of their Ramadan programme. And his assumption appeared to be correct as the audience clapped in time with the music, sang along in accompaniment, and generally vocalised their enjoyment.

The Moroccan Andalusian troupe introduced an ambitious series of Arabian Evenings, which will be held throughout Ramadan in the Cairo Opera House, and heralded the beginning of a month-long celebration staged in cultural institutions throughout the city. Ramadan — a month cast onto the year as a spell, encompassing the solemnity of the fast with a succession of poetic evenings, traditional musical instrument recitals, literary lectures and discussions of Islamic issues — descends upon the city in an elaborate tapestry of activities, clothed in programmes of popular entertainment that embody the paradox that plays itself out most commonly in facing the dilemma of the prayer rug and the television set.

The city's cultural institutions adopt a moderate stance, seeking to fuse the seeming contradictions of a month reserved for prayer and abstinence, but one that is also celebrated with theatrical performances, popular songs and poetry recitals. Indeed, in programming events for the Holy Month many institutions seek to intensify the cultural programmes taking place throughout the year. Boisterous as the month may be, post-far schedules can be densely packed with musical performances and poetry recitals which seek to express the spirit of Ramadan in music and poetry. The month's distinct imprint on the all too vociferously promoted "cultural campaign" boils down, as far as the Opera House is concerned, to an Arab Islamic flavouring being lent to dishes that are not, necessarily, seasonal. "The Cultural Activity Office is offering a deluge of activities at once cultural and Islamic," claims Adel Said of the Cairo Opera House.

It is the Small Hall at the Opera House that bears the main burden of offering alternatives to the institution's usual programme. Departing from their monthly offerings of recitals, poetry evenings, jazz concerts and cultural salons, the Small Hall is responding to the demands for dense and intensive entertainment exerted by the need to fill the 30 nights of Ramadan by offering a programme built around the tried and tested troika of Arabian evenings, academic lectures and poetry intertwined with music.

Set against the ideal of a unified Arab celebration, the Arabian Evenings draw on the harvest of ten Arab countries' artistic preparations for Ramadan, promising a space for each country to showcase its own celebrations. "Inevitably the art forms presented will be inextricably linked to the month of Ramadan and will serve to enhance the mood and spirit," pointed out Adel Said. "The musical troupe will be representative of Ramadan as it is celebrated in the country from which they come."

The Cairo Opera House supplements its pan-Arab musical ambitions with a series of lectures wrapped around a selected theme. This year it is Islam and Life, and the speakers will include Ibrahim Badran, Mustafa El-Shak'a and Abdel-Aziz Hegazi. Fusing music and poetry, three poets, Ibrahim Eissa, Yasser Qatamesh and Sharifa El-Sayed are giving recitals against a musical backdrop provided by the oud, qanun and flute.

Al-Hanager offers, if anything, a more ambitious programme, with its schedule of lectures and literary discussions assuming the dimensions of a full-blown literary festival. Included will be readings of Khairi Abdel-Gawad's *Al-Anhaq Wal Ma'waj* (The Lover and the Beloved) and Montassar El-Qafish's *Tawth Bel-Ghlab* (Permission for Departure), supplemented by discussions that will roam across the literary heritage. Al-Hanager, as always, seeks to provide an arena sympathetic to young voices, responding to the Ramadan

stimulus by promoting awareness of current literary issues, introducing new faces and new tonalities.

Undoubtedly there is a certain uniformity, even predictability, in the events offered in the centres of culture. "But the month," argues Adel Said, "possesses a distinctive character. It offers what distinguishes it and fulfills its aim."

By moving from Islamic hymns to popular music, the city's cultural institutions seek to synthesise the dual aspects of a month that is both austere and celebratory. Musical performances with a decidedly Islamic orientation by *Al-Ishraq Al-Dini* (Religious Hymns) and *Layaly Al-Nawar* (Nights of Light) and evenings of songs by Mohamed Raouf, Mohamed Hamam and Fatma Eid are offered by the cultural palaces. Al-Hanager's Ramadan Nights will feature an evening of Eastern music and madah in the Bedouin dialect. Les Nuits de Ramadan, with its distinctly popular flavour, will be held in the

Mounira Annexe of the French Cultural Centre, capturing the Ramadan spirit in a week of Nubian songs by Mohamed Hamam, popular songs by Sayed El-Sha'ir, the *dhikr* ritual, Fatma Al-Ganaini's performance of *Umm Kulthoum* songs, traditional Arabic music played by Al-Takrit Al-Sharki troupe and performances of songs and music by Sayed Darwish.

Poetry recitals, theatrical performances, songs. But what of the awaited Arabian Night tales, marionette shows of *Al-Layla Al-Kabira* and narrations of *Al-Sira Al-Hilaliya*? Rummaging through traditions and repertoires the month of Ramadan resuscitates tales, performances and memory. The National Theatre is offering narrations of Abou Zaid Al-Hilali's epic, a reading of Salah Abdel-Sabour's *Ma'at al-Halaj* (The Tragedy of Al-Halaj), selections of works by actor Mahmoud Yassin and Samir Al-Asfour and evenings with actor Abdel-Moneim Madbouli and playwright Al-Fred Farg.

Al-Ghuri, that place of culture and heritage, set in the Islamic heart of Egypt, is contributing to the theatrical performances held on the occasion of Ramadan with a play, *A Very Egyptian Ramadan*, tackling the social havoc wreaked by set meal times and the traffic jams and outbursts by bad-tempered drivers consequent upon them. The Cultural Palace, sought by flocking groups of camera men, TV hosts and interviewers — on one particular day by a Nile TV crew wishing to use Al-Ghuri Palace as the background for some of the songs presented — is offering its usual programme of whirling dervishes. The General Organisation of Cultural Palaces is presenting entertainment in tents erected in Sayeda Zeinab, Zeinabon Youth Centre and Bulaq Al-Dakrouf, offering performances of religious songs by Shafiq Galal and Ahmed Ibrahim and popular songs by Mohamed Raouf, Mohamed Hamam and Fatma Eid.

A month leavened by performances and recitals, as indispensable to the cultural scene as the famous is to Egyptian streets, Ramadan spreads out in a tapestry of activities, awakening reminiscences that strike deep into religious and folk origins. Ramadan is diffused through erected tents, palaces, opera and theatre stages, against a background of tales, epics and songs, descending upon the days of fasting and infusing them with an aura of folk tradition and popular entertainment.

Ramadan furnishes a unifying framework for disparate schedules and boosts activities with the Cairo Opera House's programme constituting "a campaign to instill cultural knowledge, not merely furnishing entertainment or celebrating the Holy Month of Ramadan," claims Adel Said.

Falling under the spell, imbibing the spirit of Arab celebrations, folk songs and musical virtuosity, the audience at the Moroccan Evening applauded during the performance, sang fragments of favourite songs prompting the singers to select the chosen favourite, interrupted with repeated "Allah's", expressing admiration and joy as they partook of the season's spirit in the present while recollecting fragments of song from another country's memory.

Plain Talk

Last week I discussed one of the papers contained in the *Proceedings of the Symposium on Comparative Literature* held at Cairo University last year, the theme of which was history and literature. It was, I wrote in my column, perhaps my love of that noble queen, Cleopatra, that led me to give such a one-sided account of the proceedings. As it is I hope to rectify that this week, when I shall not mention Cleopatra.

The success of the symposium is due in no small way to the strenuous efforts exerted by Dr Hoda Guindi, chairperson of the organising committee. She, and the organising committee, worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the event and her efforts, along with those of her committee members, cannot be applauded sufficiently.

The quality of the papers submitted was extremely high. In his introductory essay, Mohamed Enani explores *Arab History as Fiction*. He starts with the generalisation that no history can be free from fiction. Much of Arab historiography, Dr Enani states, relied on the oral reporting of events which had been preserved mostly in verse and transmitted from one generation to the next. In the process, especially if there was a weak link in the chain of sources, omissions and additions were bound to take place. The result was that long stretches of Arab history were filled with accounts of imaginary incidents and even religious rulings that had no historical basis to speak of.

Enani cites specific examples in Arab historiography where this mixing of fact and fiction has taken place. In some cases the stories were deliberately invented, "explicitly intended to amuse and to teach a moral lesson." This produced the art of storytelling...where the typical storyteller took his seat at a mosque and reported to his audience the events of history which were tales, sayings and stories and which sought not so much to tell the truth as to entice and frighten.

History, perhaps, is always a moral tale. Historiography uncovers the morals that were being implanted in what purported to be an objective reading of history. It is this that Enani explores, recognising both the inevitability of the process and the dangers of distortions that are, perhaps equally inevitable, its result.

Another interesting paper published in the conference proceedings is Azza Heikal's comparative study of *Two Contemporary Poetic Plays: T.S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral and Abdel-Rahman El-Sharkawy's El-Husseini, A Revolutionist and Martyr*. In their exploration of the lives of two historical figures who became martyrs and saints, both plays, Heikal suggests, stress "the importance of religion in our modern life".

Both plays, Heikal argues, are good examples of how religion and history can be used as a starting point of attack against modernity with its "lack of faith, injustice and chaos".

In drawing upon history, though it may well be the sort of history Professor Enani feels is neither reliable nor true, both writers were able to express what they perceived to be the dilemma of modern man. For Eliot and El-Sharkawy, the paper concludes, "man's salvation is only achieved if he surrenders to God's will, willingly and obediently aspiring to the images of the great saints and martyrs as Thomas a Becket and El-Husseini".

Mursi Saad El-Din

Ramadan nights: programme

Al-Hanager, Cairo Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily at 8 pm.

Evening with Eastern Music
1 February
Compositions by Sayed Darwish, performed by a youth music group.
Samer Arbaud (Singing and Madah in Bedouin Dialect)
2 February
Lectures: (The Manifestations of Forms in the Arts)
3 February
Guest speakers are Ezdine Nagnab, Zahir Salama, Magdi Yousef, moderated by Sayed Ali-Wakil.
Song Evening
4 February
Songs by Salwa Bahr Abou Gheisla, Mustafa Awad, Mohamed El-Shak'a and Mohamed Beshir.
Poetry Evening
5 February
Abdel-Moneim Awad Yousef, Mohamed El-Hakawati, Isam Mersal, Youssef Hassan, Karim Abdel-Salam, Ahmed Ali and Tarek Ismail.
Discussion: Literature and Literary Heritage.
6 February
Mohamed Hassan Abdalla, Sharwa Abdel-Halim, Gamal El-Ghizli and Mohamed Gohel.
Song Evening
7 February
Ali Ismail, Mohamed Saeed, Akram and Karim and Hoda Moghad.
Evening of Eastern Music
8 February
Youth trio performs Sayed Darwish songs.
Poetry Evening
9 February
Sayed Hegazi, Abdel Moneim Ramadan, Mohamed Soliman, Mahmoud Nassim, Fathi Abdalla, Sa'ad Youssef, moderated by Gigis Shoukri.
Song Evening (Part Said Tawassra Group)
10 February
Discussion: The Myth of Realism.
11 February (21 Ramadan)
Guest speakers Abdel-Moneim Halim, Salah Qasbi, moderated by Osama Farhat.

Poetry Evening
12 February (23 Ramadan)
Samir Abdel-Razek, Zein El-Abdelin Fouad, Rifat Salem, Mohamed Mattar, Gigis Shoukri, Hoda Hussain and Osama Farhat.
Discussion: Movement Theatre
13 February (24 Ramadan)
Speakers include Nihad Salama, Hanna Abdel-Fatih, Walid Azmi and Abdel-Ghani Dawoud. Moderated by Mustafa Al-Daba.
Tawth Bel-Ghlab (Permission for Departure): A Novel by Montassar El-Qafish
14 February
A discussion with Fatma Mousa, Magdi Tawfik, Sayed Ali-Wakil, moderated by Sayed Nigm.
Evening of Eastern Music
15 February
Youth trio performs music by Sayed Darwish.
Poetry Evening
16 February
An evening of poetry with Ahmed Abdel-Moneim Hegazi, Mohamed Ibrahim Abou Sima, Hassan Taha, Mohamed Khashkhash, Magdi Yousef, Hoda Hussain and Ibrahim Dawoud. Moderated by Gigis Shoukri.
Al-Sira Al-Hilaliya
17 February
Fateh Stumassid El-Haggagi.
An evening of poetry: Evening of Singing
18 February
Mohamed Beshir, Salwa Bahr Abou Gheisla, Ahmed Khalaf and Ali Ismail.
Opera House, Gezira. Tel 340 6861.
National Arabic Music Ensemble
19 February
An evening of music: Evening of Singing
20 February
Cairo Symphony Orchestra
21 February
Conducted by Sayed Awad.
Arabian Evening with Algeria
22 February
Small Hall, 3 February, 9 pm.
The National Theatre, Al-Azaba. Tel 579 1778. Daily 8:30 pm.
Poetry and Song Evening
23 February
Selections from Salah Jahin.
Al-Sira Al-Hilaliya
24 February

Stumassid El-Haggagi with performers from Upper Egypt.
Selected theatrical works
25 February
A selection of performances directed by Ahmed Taha.
Reading of Salah Abdel-Sabour's *Tragedy of Al-Halaj* (Ma'at al-Halaj)
26 February
Hall, 3 February
Directed by Samia Habib.
Al-Tawassra
27 February
Song and music from Port Said.
Repertoire works of Mahmoud Yassin
28 February
Evening with Ali El-Ra'i
29 February
Hall, 6 February
Songs from plays
7 February
Featuring Sobhi Taha Hussein.
Poetry and Song Evening
8 February
Works by Beiran Al-Toni.
A Play from Port Said: *Al-Ghirbal*
9 February
Play reading
10 February
Directed by Samia Habib.
Alexandria Chorus
11 February
Repertoire Works of Samir Al-Asfour
12 February
Songs from Plays
13 February
Featuring Mohamed Mounir.
Poetry and Song Evening
14 February
Al-Ghuri Culture Palace, Al-Husseini. Tel 510 0823.
The Poetess
5 and 6 February
British band perform an eclectic mix of pop, jazz and folk.
All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Books

Twice-told tales

Nadla El-Kholi reviews the reformulation of traditional folktales in Denys Johnson-Davies' translations for children

Denys Johnson-Davies has been described by Edward Said as "the leading Arabo-English translator of our time". He has published more than 20 volumes of short stories, novels, plays and poetry translated from modern Arabic literature. He has done more than any other translator to introduce in English the best contemporary writing in the Arab world. It is indeed commendable that Johnson-Davies' efforts did not stop at adult literature. He has recently contributed to children's literature by his retelling of Egyptian and Moroccan folktales and popular stories from *A Thousand and One Nights*. It is an exciting thought that the literary and folk traditions of the Arab world are so readily available in English. One particular aspect of international relations in which books can play an important role is in the publication in all countries of the stories which typify the traditions and attitudes to life of other countries. Thus, in the case of a small child, a book can do much to assist him in his individual development and in relation to the community in which he lives. Literature, which tells in an interesting manner of the life of people perhaps living at the other

end of a child's world, can equip the child with a maturity of social outlook and a sympathy and understanding of those who do not live and think in an identical manner to himself. The importance of understanding of other cultures is becoming more widely recognised in the world of children's books. Hoopoe publishers, in their ambitious project of producing high quality children's books in English, can do nothing but good in spreading a greater international understanding of Arab culture. It must be remembered, however, that the parts of the original works which reach readers in other countries are the plot, the setting, and the characters. The style must be the translator's, and such intangibles as humour may or may not be translatable. In the hands of an indifferent translator a great work will suffer and its latent meanings will be lost to those unable to read it in its original tongue. Denys Johnson-Davies chose to retell the stories, and chose to give vent to his creative talents, rather than restrict himself to too faithful a translation of the original texts. In *Folk Tales of Egypt* (1993) Johnson-Davies adapted oral legends and folktales to con-

coot an eminently readable and delightful collection of seven stories the longest of which is that about the famous "Clever Hassan". In these stories — handsomely illustrated by Tarek Mossaad — an assortment of animals, magical creatures, giants and children struggle for a life in which good overcomes evil. These fast moving and adventurous fantasies provide insight into the values and culture of the Egyptian people. They stress the importance of close relationships, hard work, bravery, gentleness, and beauty. The tales are set in Egypt, although many of the stories appear to be timeless legends no doubt passed from generation to generation. All demonstrate a close relationship to nature and portray a land in which magic and illusion are accepted aspects of life. Stories of hope and optimism, they recall a golden age and assure the reader that times of peace, gentleness, and kindness are still possible. They address questions such as what the source of evil in the world is, and whether there is any possibility that good will ultimately triumph. The stories also treat such themes as the order and beauty of nature, the dangers of illusion and impossible wishes, and the

necessity of facing challenges with courage and creativity. Davies narrates the stories in a conversational tone, in a way that an aged wise man might have told them on a cool summer evening to his fellow villagers while sipping mint tea. Some of the stories are told in the first person, while others are third person accounts of ancient legends. Frequently a tale will begin in the first person, then change to the third person for a story within a story. Tarek Mossaad's handsome illustrations embellish this folklore collection, which reads easily. Johnson-Davies' latest collection of folk tales, *Tales from Morocco*, is superbly illustrated. Each of the six tales features animal characters that cleverly outwit each other and deliver a didactic message. These ancient fables have been re-told authentically, the intrinsic humour kept intact. Each tale is enhanced by Yasser Gaissa's spirited, colourful drawings that sprawl over double-page spreads. The third book that falls within the category of folklore is *Goha*. The humorous retellings of the 27 Goha tales are matched in their simplicity by Nessim Girgis' bright, cheerful caricatures. Pre-

posterous situations and piercing humour abound in Goha's pranks. The style is simple and direct and succeeds in presenting Goha as a "wise fool". Johnson-Davies' next contribution is the adaptation of three tales from *A Thousand and One Nights*. He started with the two most popular tales of *The Voyages of Sindbad* (1994) and *Aladdin* (1995) and most recently published *Maarouf and the Dream Caravan* (1996). The smooth retelling of these well-known stories, with their moving incidents, both violent and romantic, are balanced with subtle humour. The magical enchantment that is always associated with *The Arabian Nights* is well preserved. Both *Aladdin*, illustrated by Walid Taher, and *Maarouf and the Dream Caravan*, illustrated by Yasser Gaissa, are similar in their action-filled, brightly coloured caricatures that are impressionistic and often humorous. In contrast Mohamed Ta'eb's illustrations of *Sindbad* are bold, stylised paintings that create a dramatic panorama for the events of Sindbad's three voyages and successfully capture the tale's dramatic tone. Moving from the world of action and adventure we come to *Animal Tales* from

the *Arab World* (1995) which is a collection of fourteen stories adapted from *A Thousand and One Nights*, *Katila* and *Dimna* and other Arabic sources which the author acknowledges at the back of the edition, though it would have been more useful to the reader to include a note at the end of each story specifying its source. Popular in almost every literary period, the beast fable is most often designed to satirise human folly as well as to provide moral instruction. Many of the maxims are modern and non-traditional; all are thought provoking. The contrast between the animals, the implied nature of the wild and the tame, the refreshing lack of explanation, all make this an interesting book. A whimsical watercolour by Eda S. Ghali aptly illustrates each fable. If they are to read at all, children have to enjoy what they are reading. Writers, too, have to find joy in what they are writing. Denys Johnson-Davies has found the key to many children's hearts and minds. "Where the children's books were concerned," he says, "...it was a new departure for me and I greatly enjoyed the experience".

The natural way

Last week, *Al-Ahram Weekly* looked at the dangers of plunging blindly into homeopathy. This week, **Fayza Hassan** sheds more light on the controversy, discussing alternative medicine with practitioners and patients

Rumours of malpractice and the indiscriminate dispensing of unnecessary drugs have caused an upsurge of interest in different ways of tackling disease. Disappointment with the limitations of "modern medicine" and its side effects has become more widespread as more people discover the consequences of pharmaceutical products, leading more physicians and many lay people to become interested in alternative medicine. Ironically, practitioners of homeopathy and other "new" or "alternative" forms of healing draw on sciences which precede the birth of modern medicine by thousands of years. Now, however, new technologies applied to age-old techniques are making it possible to do away with a number of pharmaceutical products.

A limited number of physicians in Egypt actually treat patients with herbal medicines, chiropractic techniques, acupuncture or homeopathy. Most of the patients emerge from the experience convinced of the merits of the alternative method. There is, however, an ongoing battle between those who would like to see more alternative medicine practiced and those who denounce it as the realm of charlatanism. It cannot be denied that what has come to be known as alternative medicine is cheaper than the modern variant, and therefore welcome in Egypt, where the vast majority of the population, more often than not, cannot afford the high fees of private clinics and hospitals. Furthermore, alternative ways of healing are generally devoid of harmful side effects. The very real danger remains, however, of the patient falling prey to untrained practitioners or charlatans and therefore wasting precious time in securing the right diagnosis and the right cure. "But," says "tante" Olfat, "doctors, too, can make mistakes."

Tante Olfat is surprisingly active at the age of 84. She attributes her good health to the fact that for a long time now she has not visited the doctor. She uses "prescriptions" that have been handed down from generation to generation in her family to cure her minor ailments. Sleep, according to her, will cure almost anything. "Doctors are not what they used to be," she says. "In the olden days, a doctor took time to talk with his patients. He listened. Then he examined the patient with hands, eyes and ears. The only instruments he had were the awful tongue depressor and his stethoscope. He asked the patient to say '33'. That was enough for the doctor to know what was wrong. He never scared the daylight out of you with the names of strange diseases. He was always paternal and reassuring, telling us that there was nothing the matter with us. Just seeing our family doctor made me feel better. He often gave us medicines he made himself. They tasted foul but were effective. And he always prescribed rest: the long lazy days in bed were the best part of the treatment."

Tante Olfat experienced a serious bout of nostalgia after what happened to Anna, the woman who cleans her house. Anna had a bad case of influenza last month and was eventually sent to a doctor who demanded tests and X-rays. The results stunned everybody: Anna, the doctor said, had tuberculosis. She came out of the clinic with a prescription two pages long. She took to her bed. Within a few days, Anna's sister informed Olfat that Anna looked like she was going to die soon. She could no longer walk and refused any solid foods. Tante Olfat, ever the fighter, called a doctor. Anna was taken to his clinic. More tests and X-rays followed. Twenty-four hours later Anna was declared as fit as a fiddle, a little weak perhaps as a result of the unnecessary medication but with no trace of ever having had tuberculosis.

Egyptians must be among the largest consumers of over-the-counter remedies in the world. Headaches, joint pains, constipation, diarrhoea, colds and coughs, send us running to the pharmacy, where an array of tablets, pills, suppositories, capsules and



Disappointed by what medicine has to offer, chronic sufferers often turn to those who give them a glimmer of hope

sympoms are displayed to choose from and buy cheaply, no questions asked. Friends and relations prescribe freely according to their own experience, while many pharmacists and doctors' assistants claim to be able to cure "as well as the doctor himself". Antibiotics, sometimes left over from a previous illness, are prescribed and absorbed freely. Considering the difficulties of securing a doctor's appointment, and its cost in terms of time and money, who can blame the patient pressed for both? Medical practitioners, on the other hand, claim that their patients will not be satisfied and trust them unless they leave the clinic with a prescription longer than their arm. Some of them oblige.

Notwithstanding this glut of chemical products which is constantly entering our systems, the Egyptian population is showing no signs of improved health. Quite the contrary. This fact, as well as changing world trends, has induced a number of people to take an interest in different ways of tackling health complaints. But, says Dr Ibissam Soliman, MD (Stuttgart University) and former assistant professor of anaesthesiology at Jordan University, who has studied homeopathy in Germany, the problem is that those qualified to apply alternative curative methods are few and far between. "Take homeopathy, for instance. It is a totally personalised method of healing. What is prescribed to one patient can in no case help another with apparently the same complaint. The homeopathic product is tailor-made and based on the intimate knowledge that the homeopath has of his patient's complete health history and condition."

Dr Soliman says that a large number of charlatans have invaded the field and that their practices are not regulated by law. "There is absolutely no supervision of any sort. In Sharqiya alone there are 200 practitioners who claim to be acupuncturists, herbalists, and homeopaths. Chinese acupuncturists train for 20 years with a master before they are allowed to practice. In France and Germany homeopathy is recognised as a branch of medicine and treatment is reimbursed by social security. Many physicians work in close cooperation with homeopaths. Only in this way can maximum benefits be

derived from alternative medicine, which becomes complementary to and supportive of orthodox medicine."

Nowadays, however, says Soliman, kits of acupuncture needles are sold on the market and almost anybody can take a two-month course in Europe or China and come back to establish him or herself as a self-appointed acupuncturist, advertising miraculous results with weight problems, alcoholism, drug addiction or juvenile acne. Basically they rely on auto-suggestion to effect the cure and in some cases it works.

But, she adds, this is not what alternative medicine is about. On the contrary, this tendency has given it a bad name. A physician himself, Soliman is reluctant to use alternative methods although she firmly believes in their effectiveness. These methods were being abused before we even started to use them seriously, she says. In France, she notes, homeopaths fought for a long time for homeopathy to be recognised. The struggle benefited both practitioners — who are taken seriously — and patients — who are treated by professionals.

Here, however, the do-it-yourself method is followed: many people, according to Soliman, buy a book or attend a couple of lectures and establish themselves as homeopaths. Few know of schools of homeopathy where four years of courses are necessary for students to qualify as homeopaths. "Commercial" applications of a science which truly consists in a different or additional way of helping patients is giving a bad name to attempts at limiting chemical abuse, and may eventually lead to accidents if not properly applied, concludes Soliman.

Lennert Holdijk, a professor of English literature at the American University in Cairo, thinks that Soliman is exaggerating the danger of unprofessional applications of homeopathic remedies. A student of homeopathy at the Imenhotep Society, Holdijk uses many remedies to attend to the minor ailments of his family and friends. "My children have never taken antibiotics so far," he says. "Many people use antibiotics to cure a cold although it has been known for a long time that they are ineffective in this case. They are even harmful because they low-

er natural immunity and when you really need them they will no longer be effective." That is not to say that Holdijk would consider treating a burst appendix with homeopathy. "But neither will I run to the surgeon at the first sign of colic," he says. He believes that one should seek homeopathic treatment first, and if this does not work, he would advise consulting a general practitioner, a specialist and finally a surgeon as the case requires. A homeopathic remedy should give positive results within 48 hours, he says. If this does not happen he knows that he has to alter his course. A good dose of common sense is needed, but, says Holdijk, his first move is definitely not to reach for the antibiotics.

Soliman, however, is not convinced: diagnosis is of the essence, she says. A runny nose can — and most of the time does — indicate the inception of a common cold. On the other hand, meningitis and polio also start with a runny nose. Unless the illness is properly diagnosed, one cannot claim to be applying the correct remedy.

Dr Fathi Nasr, a professor of anaesthesiology and head of the pain relief unit at Al-Zahra University Hospital, teaches alternative methods to the administration of morphine as a painkiller. He uses biofeedback (the use of results of past performance in controlling a given system) to treat chronic pain, as well as electromagnetic waves and laser radiations. These methods carry no danger of chemical addiction and are safe to use provided the user has been trained in their medical applications.

So, is alternative medicine mumbo-jumbo? Surely, turning to the herbalist to buy a mysterious preparation meant to cure infertility, persistent coughs or epilepsy or going to a self-appointed acupuncturist who claims miraculous results in weight loss is not necessarily a good idea. But maybe orthodox medicine as it is practiced today has lent itself to abuses and may benefit from "alternatives" or complementary treatments in many cases. Keeping in mind that treatment may well imply much more than immediate alleviation of physical symptoms.



It's like that, cat

A couple of months ago, my daughter had a sleepless night. A kitten, she said, probably abandoned by its mother, had been yowling its misery out to an indifferent world. In the morning, she was in search of the orphan. She came back holding a pitiful something that defied description. It could have been a baby rat, or perhaps an undernourished weasel. "It's a kitten," she said defensively before I could express any doubts as to the nature of the creature.

I thought it heartless to point out that we were already the proud owners of seven foundlings which had entered our home in more or less similar circumstances; nor did I mention a friend of my mother's, a landmark in Maadi, who has cared for strays for over 50 years, dedicating her life and fortune to them; nor yet did I see fit to remind her of a friend of mine, a famous artist who has transformed her dream villa into an animal shelter. I was not in their league.

Besides, this particular kitten was not going to make it, by the looks of it. Its mouth was too tiny even for a dropper. We soaked a bit of cotton wool in watered-down milk and let it suck on it. It did. It did not seem to know that, in order to survive, it needed a mother cat — or at least part thereof. Yet survive it did. It hung on to the cotton wool for dear life. Soon it was staggering about on its tiny, wobbly paws, collapsing from exhaustion then picking itself up and proceeding in its exploration of the surroundings. I think it was born with the same genes that propelled Attila the Hun on his mission of destruction. But that was to become apparent a little later. In the beginning, it contented itself with simple adventures.

One day, it disappeared from the room we had securely locked it in. We eventually found it tightly wedged between the wall and the back of a bookshelf. We had to extract it by squeezing it to half its minute size. None the worse for the handling, it shook out its sparse, non-descript clumps of fur and headed right back to the cozy niche from which it had just been extracted. Another time it escaped and was confronted by the horde of our seven other cats, who chased it around the apartment, mistaking it for a mouse. A large number of breakables were sacrificed that day. The kitten was eventually caught by one of our more agile Siamese, shaken like a rag and finally deposited, half dazed, as an offering at our feet. Unruffled, it picked itself up and disappeared. We found it sleeping in a pot on the stove.

In view of its obvious powers of survival, we decided it could now fend for itself and gave it the run of the house. It exhibited very gregarious instincts at once and in no time became a good little trooper, bringing up the rear whenever the gang descended on the kitchen at meal times. At first we thought it might not get a fair share in view of its size. Our fears, however, were unfounded. The little thing had a technique of its own. It would dive full length into the plate and, lying down in the food, slurp around with noises characteristic of swine at the trough, then casually pick the rest off its mangy fur. Perched on the kitchen counter, our sultana valide, our old Cleo, would watch in disbelief, forgetting to dauntly pick at her own food. Cleaning the little creature was a bit of a problem and, until it was big enough to tidy itself, a vague smell of sardines was the tell-tale sign of its whereabouts. With time, we noticed that we had never had a hungrier kitten, nor a less selective one. It drank my tea in the morning, given half a chance, and was partial to instant coffee. Dry bread provoked violently appreciative grunts while a pot of boiled vegetables was an immediate incentive to dive. One of its favourite tricks now is to lie in wait next to the refrigerator for a chance to slip in unseen. Our own meals are surrounded by the strictest security measures, and shopping bags are only brought to the house when our kitten has been painstakingly locked in.

Hoping to outwit the little ogre the other day, I crept to the refrigerator, checking carefully that the coast was clear and sneaked my hand noiselessly in to retrieve a carton of milk. Gluttonous snuffs alerted me at once. Seeing nothing, I was confused at first, but I soon discovered the Hun in the chicken soup, hugging half a chicken. "Bones, it is eating bones," I panicked. Yanking the pot out, I tried unsuccessfully to pry the live animal away from the dead bird, attracting the gang of seven, which proceeded to dance around me, claws extended for this unexpected treat. Clutching pot, beast and bird, I ran around madly, the howling gang in hot pursuit, reached a window and, in utter despair, gripping Attila savagely by the scruff of its straggly neck, hurled the pot (minus kitten) out of the window.

My daughter tells me that lately, she has been hearing pitiful mews coming from the garden.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Khoshaf

Ingredients:
1/4 kg of each of the following:
Dried prunes, dried figs, dried apricots
1/2 kg of each of the following:
Dried raisins, dried sheets of apricots
(qamar eddin)
Shelled and skinned almonds

Method:
Cut the *qamar eddin* sheets into small squares by means of a pair of scissors. Place them in a bowl and pour over some boiling water enough to cover them by at least 4 to 5 cms and leave until they soften. Beat in a blender forming a rather thick juice and set aside. Wash the raisins in some tap water and leave aside. In a large cooking pan, start boiling the figs in hot water. When they become tender enough, add the apricots and add more boiling water to cover all. Before the apricots become fully tender, add the prunes and more water to cover it. Continue cooking for 10 more minutes after the third addition starts boiling. Remove from heat and add the raisins mixing them in. cover and allow them to become fuller within the heat of the pan and the juices of the ingredients. When the pan contents cool off, add the *qamar eddin* juice blending it in well with a spoon into all the ingredients. Notice that the juice may not be enough, therefore you may need to add more water as dried fruits tend to absorb liquid. Finally, add the almonds, blending them in. No sugar is needed as the fruit juices are sweet enough. Pour into a serving bowl and refrigerate.

Serve cold as an *iftar* dessert.
Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Retro decor, standard fare

Nigel Ryan sits in a brown velvet booth

There is something a little too theme-park about Le Pacha 1901 for my taste, though I would be the first to admit that it is not only comfortable but extremely pleasant to sit by a window in one of the many restaurants contained in this moored reconstruction of what looks like a Mississippi steamer and watch the Nile flow by. And last week I did just that, occupying a window booth in Le Steak, the Le Pacha restaurant named, it seems, with the intention of capturing the customs of the most uncompromising of carnivores.

Le Steak claims to be the boat's Belle Epoque restaurant, which in restaurant-speak means large quantities of dark wood, brass chandeliers, Toulouse Lautrec posters, wall sconces and brown velvet. And Le Steak goes as far as the genre goes. The menu, as you might expect, is heavily weighted towards meat. Various cuts of beef appear in various guises, though there are the usual alternatives, including fish, chicken and veal. And then there are the *mezzes*, which are always excellent. We began with a selection of these, which included *sambousak* filled with cream cheese, *hummus*, *babaganough* and *taboula*. Plain, simple, and very well done. The *hummus* and *babaganough* were particularly good. I also ordered grilled calamari, which managed to be almost as good as the *mezzes*, perhaps a little tougher than one might have hoped, but quickly consumed nonetheless. And then the main courses. This being Le Steak, and the company lacking

any vegetarians, eyes went immediately to *la viande*. (Had there been a non-flesh eater among our number, it would be difficult to think what they might have ordered. But would a non-flesh eater have any inclination, let alone business, to patronise a restaurant called Le Steak?) I ordered *coeur de boeuf* Johnny, as did another at the table. The two others opted for veal, one *blanquette*, the other an *escalope* with cheese and ham.

It would be impossible to quibble with the quality of the meat served, which was as good as could be expected. The *coeur de boeuf* consisted of two medallions of fillet, and came with a mustard sauce. I prefer meat to be on the bloodier side of pink, though for some reason, on this occasion, asked for the beef to be medium. It arrived overcooked, which was shame. Both veal eaters pronounced their dishes fine.

The menu at Le Steak is hardly innovative. The food offered is standard, restaurant fare, though it is produced, on the whole, with unusual attention to detail. And the service was exemplary. It cannot be faulted: the waiters were attentive without being intrusive, the *maitre d'hôtel* the very model of professionalism. Everything went by without a hitch, as the Nile flowed past the window.

Lunch for four, including coffee, one dessert and four bottles of Stella beer, came to LE366. Not exactly cheap, though well worth it, not least for the view.

Le Steak, at Le Pacha 1901, Corniche Zamalek, opposite Gezira Club. Tel: 340 5734

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

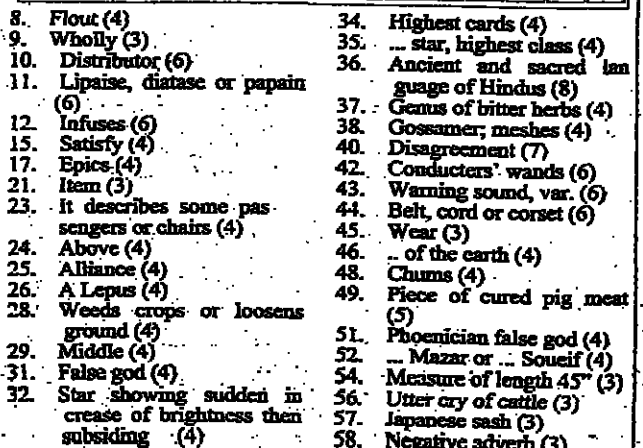
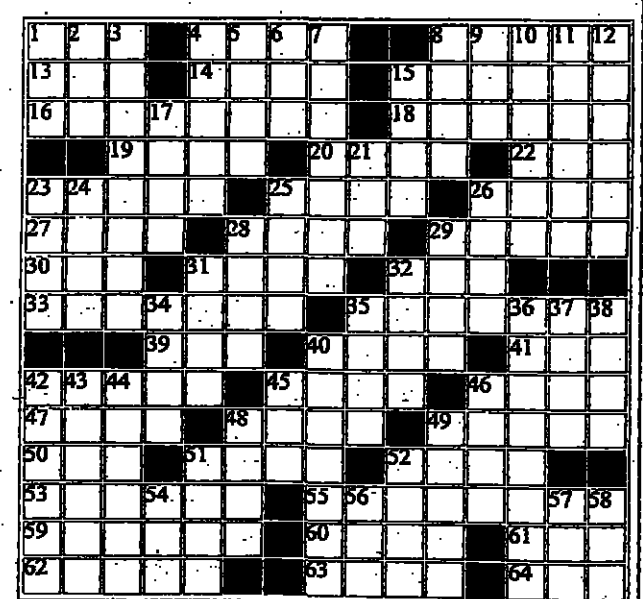
By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS

1. Greek letter (3)
4. Sanglier (4)
8. Gem stone, pl. (5)
13. Sunburn (3)
14. Egg on (4)
15. Mute (6)
16. Praised (8)
18. Glowing (6)
19. Inactive (4)
20. Knowledge got by repetition (4)
22. A cleansing substance (3)
23. Victims of deception (5)
25. Part of N.B. (4)
26. Cortical fibre used for rope and stout fabrics (4)
27. Epic poem (4)
28. Stockings (4)
29. Anxieties (5)
30. Depression in mountain-chain (3)
31. Electrically charged particles (4)
32. Neither's partner (3)
33. Worked up moist flour into dough (7)
35. Predicted (7)
39. Lettuce (3)
40. Plunge into water (4)
41. Pub serving (3)
42. Hard ring-shaped bread roll (5)
45. Primal downs (4)
46. Person with arrogant behaviour (4)
47. Miss McGraw et al. (4)
48. Assume attitude to impress others (4)
49. Foundations (5)
50. Bitumen (3)
51. Boycotts (4)
52. Shrink (4)
53. Experience that tests character or endurance (6)
55. Particle with charge of negative electricity (3)
59. Hardwood clubs used by aborigines (5)
60. Emphatic denial, 2 wds (4)
61. SE Nigerian tribe (3)
62. One of the senses (5)
63. Pair (4)
64. Nipple (3)

DOWN

1. French summer (3)
2. Tariff (3)
3. Direct opposite (8)
4. Cattle treats violently (5)
5. Narrow border near end of shield (4)
6. Time (3)
7. Set straight again (7)
8. Flout (4)
9. Wholly (3)
10. Distributor (6)
11. Lapse, disease or pain (6)
12. Infuses (6)
15. Satisfy (4)
17. Epics (4)
21. Item (3)
23. It describes some passengers or chairs (4)
24. Above (4)
25. Alliance (4)
26. A Lepus (4)
28. Weeds crops or loosens ground (4)
29. Middle (4)
31. False god (4)
32. Star showing sudden increase of brightness then subsiding (4)
34. Highest cards (4)
35. ... star, highest class (4)
36. Ancient and sacred language of Hindus (8)
37. Genus of bitter herbs (4)
38. Gossamer; meshes (4)
40. Disagreement (7)
42. Conductors' wands (6)
43. Warning sound, var. (6)
44. Belt, cord or corset (6)
45. Wear (3)
46. of the earth (4)
48. Chums (4)
49. Piece of cured pig's meat (5)
51. Phoenician false god (4)
52. ... Mazar or ... Soufflé (4)
54. Measure of length 45" (3)
56. Utter cry of cattle (3)
57. Japanese actor (2)
58. Negative adverb (3)



مركز الامم المتحدة

After iftar

Ramadan is not only a month of fasting and piety. Sundown brings with it *iftar* and the year's longest evenings. Whether watching TV at home or going out on the town, most Egyptians insist on filling the hours between *iftar* and pre-dawn *sohour* with a heavy dose of entertainment

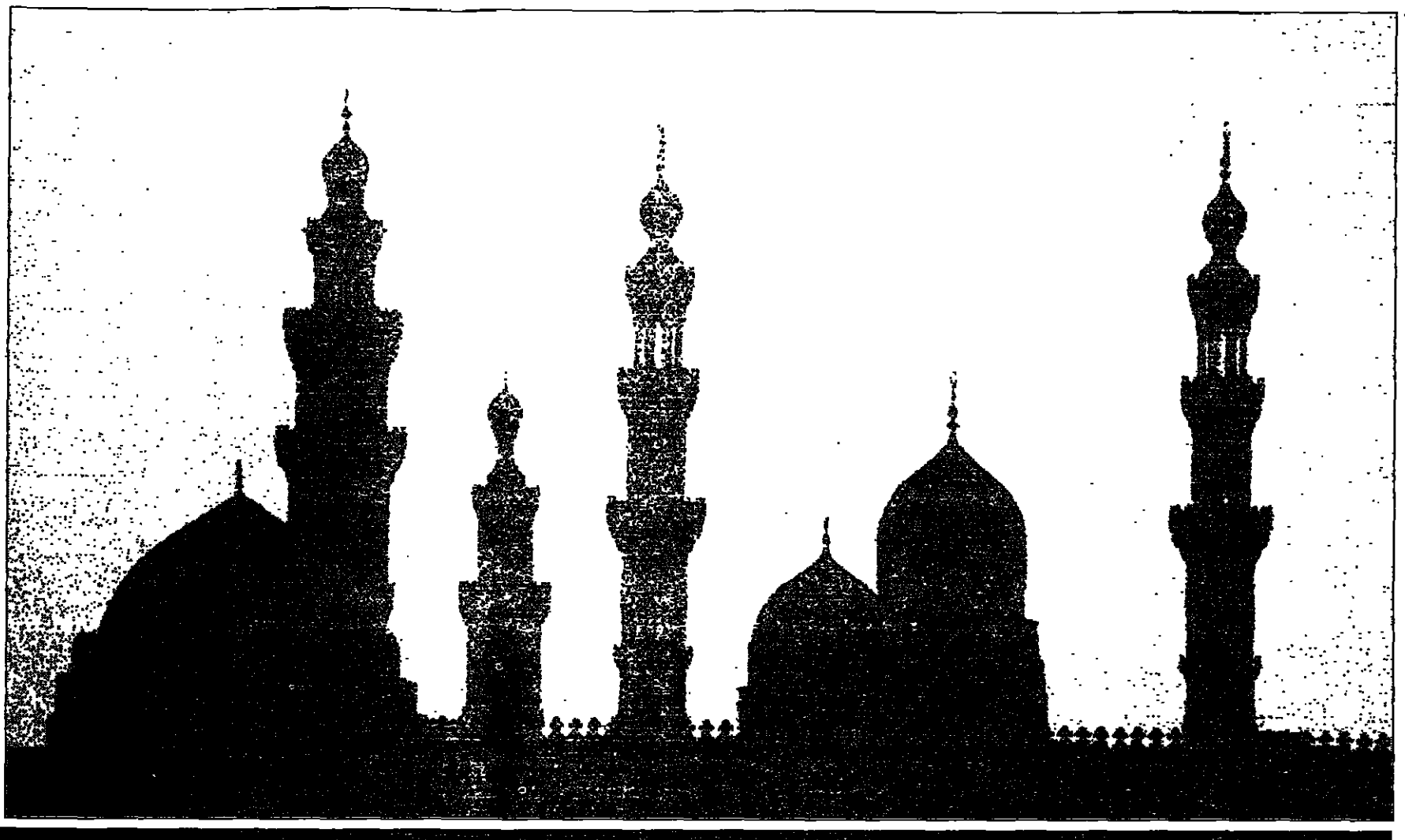


Photo: Sherif Sorbel

Scheherazade's last message

During Ramadan millions of viewers are being treated to yet another version of the classic "A Thousand and One Nights". Katia Sabet visited the set during production

For Abdel Aziz El-Sukkari, the world is tinged with blue. And that is not just an empty metaphor. On the set, at Cairo's Mist Studios where the director shot the latest version of "A Thousand and One Nights", everything is indeed bathed in a surreal turquoise blue light. The floor is covered with blue felt, the walls are lined with blue fabric and the ceiling is made of blue polystyrene.

In their monochrome universe, the actors move without casting shadows and with no visible props. The handsome Prince Fadlallah flies through the clouds, the mermaid emerges from the waves and the witch appears by magic from a blazing furnace. El-Sukkari's version of this classic is being screened each evening throughout much of the Arab world during the month of Ramadan, which began 21 January.

There have been countless screen versions of "A Thousand and One Nights" as a wonderfully fertile source of captivating tales, half-way between fable and legend. There were the Hollywood epics of the 1950s and the masterpiece by Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini in 1963. There have been adaptations by Walt Disney and there have been other serial versions made by Egyptian television.

Loved equally by children and grown-ups, these tales occupy a major place in the Arab literary tradition. They have the advantage that they can be read on different levels, according to a reader's own culture and point of view. "A Thousand and One Nights" was only discovered by the Western world in the 18th century, after a translation, albeit a rather free one, was brought out by French writer Antoine Galland. But on their home territory they have always been part of the popular folklore, thanks, in earlier times, to the strolling minstrels and, much later, to Cairo Radio, which began broadcasting the tales back in the late 1950s. The signature tune for this long-running series, taken from the "Scheherazade" suite by Rimsky-Korsakoff, was to become famous in even the most remote corners of the Arab world. The production currently being screened has different music.

Television took up the challenge towards the end of the 1970s. TV serials each lasting 30 episodes — as many as the days in the month of Ramadan — have regaled generations of viewers since they were first screened. Each year, scriptwriters and directors have pulled out all the stops to make the tales told by Scheherazade seem even more colourful and fantastic.

"In a field where there are virtually no limits to the imagination, it has become almost obligatory to try to outdo the previous version," said El-Sukkari. "Paradoxically, given the almost endless possibilities offered by special effects done on the computer, it is becoming harder and harder to outdo oneself."

On the blue stage, the usual tension associated with any television production reigns supreme. Stretched out on a beam — rigorously painted in blue — the young male lead, Ahmed Abdel-Aziz, 38, dressed in the sumptuous clothes of Prince Fadlallah, mimes the movements of a bird in flight. The television archives supplied the landscape and backdrops that the prince discovers on his extraordinary journey.

A huge stage fan creates the effect of wind rustling through the hair and clothes of the prince. When the actor's heavy silk brocade cape refuses to flutter as it should, a stage-hand attaches an invisible length of nylon to it so that it waves in the breeze as he flies over the treetops.

In recent years, Ahmed Abdel-Aziz has established himself as the most popular young face on Egyptian television. The choice of this favourite actor for the leading role has guaranteed the series record ratings. But director El-Sukkari has other aces up his sleeve, which he says will ensure that this version of "A Thousand and One Nights" proves truly unforgettable.

"This time we have broken all the rules and reached new heights," said El-Sukkari, pausing from a break in the direction of what is his third version of the Arab classic. "We are using magical stage settings on five different stages and special visual effects never seen before on television screens in the Middle East. Everything possible has been done to ensure that this production will be very different."

For a start, says the director, the whole pace of the action has been changed. "This time, I am seeing 'A Thousand and One Nights' through modern eyes and although I'm retaining the medieval authenticity of the tales, this will make them much more spicy and immediate to us," he said. "Although there are a great many special effects, which will constantly transport viewers into a world of make-believe, a lot of people will be able to recognise themselves in some of the characters."

El-Sukkari is using three main techniques for his special effects. "The best known and the most traditional are those that are filmed directly," he explained. "For example, a bottle which spews out

fire, an explosion, a flower that blossoms, a back-drop that changes colour — these and other effects can be achieved by the many features on our video cameras. The second technique is shooting in Chroma-key," he continued. "The actors move about against a blue background, but this disappears in editing and is replaced by a totally different background or landscape, taken from our television archives. In this way, we were able to show Ahmed Abdel-Aziz flying over the Alps and his leading lady, played by Dalal Abdel-Aziz, [no relation to the actor] moving about in the depths of the sea."

The third and most spectacular technique used by El-Sukkari, for the very first time this year, enables him to create strange creatures and bewildering effects thanks to computer imaging. These images are created on computers and elaborated at the Pyramid Video Service (PVS) in the Al-Ahram Computer Centre.

Conjuring up fantastic birds, snakes that can talk, genies who turn into men, and old hags who become young and beautiful again is a specialty of Tarek Rashad, 40, who with his goatee beard and his long graying hair has become a familiar face to El-Sukkari's movie team. In his "kitchen," as he calls his laboratory, situated in the Al-Ahram building, his equipment — the very smallest piece of which costs \$100,000 — throbs and winks away, night and day.

"We put aside all our other (mostly advertising) work to concentrate on 'A Thousand and One Nights'" said the special effects technician, displaying on his screen a salmon-coloured bird whose movements must now be developed using a series of computer graphics. "This is the pink bird of love, the good genie who will help Prince Fadlallah in his adventures and we will give him a pair of pink wings like its own."

Computer imaging is still extremely costly. One second of film costs about \$300, but PVS reportedly offered a discount price for this series. "The scriptwriter, who is called Nader Khalifa recognises no bounds when it comes to the imagination," said El-Sukkari, laughing. "There isn't a single scene we shot in a straightforward manner, without using special effects and flogging ourselves to death."

Nader Khalifa is a modest man in his early 50s, with a serious tone of voice. To look at him, one would never think such surreal scenes and dialogues could be buzzing around in his brain. "For my stories, I drew on two masterpieces of Arab literature — 'A Thousand and One Nights' and 'A Thousand and One Days,'" said the scriptwriter.

In "A Thousand and One Nights," King Shahrayar, embittered by the infidelity of his first wife, marries a different virgin every night and has her beheaded the following morning. But then Scheherazade steps in. The daughter of the Vizier, she demands to marry the king and uses a ploy to stop the killing. Each night, she tells King Shahrayar a thrilling tale, and pretends to fall asleep just as it reaches the most exciting part. Desperate to know the outcome, the king spares her next morning. Day after day. After a thousand and one nights of marvelous stories, the sultan falls hopelessly in love with Scheherazade, her life is saved and there is no more killing.

"A Thousand and One Days" is less well known," said Khalifa. "It is a manuscript that Rifa'a El-Tahtawi — the renowned Egyptian scholar of the 19th century — gave to the French Arabist Saint-Croix, so he could translate it into French. It is now housed in the library of the Mosque of Umm Al-Qualouyn in Morocco. Just as 'A Thousand and One Nights' tried to prove that not all women are treacherous, 'A Thousand and One Days' tried to show us that evil does not necessarily have a masculine face."

In the story, Princess Soada refuses to marry, because she claims to have had a dream in which a gazelle falls into a hunter's net and is abandoned to its fate by its mate, the male gazelle. The princess's father, the king, despairs until one day her nurse, Mog El-Bahr (meaning sea waves) begins to tell the princess marvelous stories which prove to her that there are men in the world who are loving and faithful.

Seen by some as the male answer to the tale of Scheherazade, the themes taken from 'A Thousand and One Days' are sure to please even the most macho men this Ramadan. But the scriptwriter claims his aims are far more subtle. "In fact I don't set out to extol the merits of men over women, or vice-versa," said Khalifa. "The subject I am interested in is love, which encompasses every virtue — courage, tenderness, patience, loyalty. And I am not just talking about love between a man and a woman, but also the love of a leader for his subjects, and the love that we have learned for others less fortunate than us. My hope is that the images we use, which will really be quite extraordinary this year, will perhaps help get this message across."

(WNL)

Red songs and castanets

Rashda Ragab spends a Ramadan night soaking in the sounds of popular music

Ten years ago the still popular Fishawi and Al-Darawish coffee shops were unique in the Al-Husseini district. Today the area boasts dozens of bustling coffee shops. But during Ramadan, Al-Darawish, situated behind Al-Husseini mosque, is home to the popular music group Nougoum Al-Husseini — making it a favourite haunt for Ramadan festivity seekers.

A singer, two lute players, two trumpet players and a castanets player issue spirited tunes from atop a small stage in one of the coffee shop's three main rooms. Here, the audience enjoys the music while sipping on traditional Ramadan drinks such as *khurroub* and *sahlab*. Two sleepy cats occupy a chair next to a woman who is trying to discreetly enjoy a *shisha*. "I greet Al-Haji Mohamed Atef from Al-Haram, Ahmed Elwan from Tora and Mustafa Awad from Imbaba," bellows out Nougoum Al-Husseini's group leader who publicly salutes those offering tips to the troupe during the performance. According to Al-Darawish owner Said Mohamed Youssef, this is the only coffeshop in Al-Husseini where a popular music troupe performs.

Mohamed Hussein, a 30-year-old carpenter, listens to the group every night at Al-Darawish from 10 pm to 2 am. "This only happens one month out of the year," he says. The troupe's fame has grown from their performances at Al-Darawish and their albums are available both in Al-Husseini and elsewhere. Members of the audience often ask them to perform at weddings or religious festivals throughout Egypt.

Due to popular demand, Nougoum Al-Husseini's founder, Sayed Azab El-Sayed, aged 66, increased the group's members to six singers and 10 musicians. El-Sayed, originally from Aqua village in Al-Sharqiya governorate, found his way to Al-Husseini district more than half a century ago. There, he joined a popular music troupe as a lute player. Soon, El-Sayed claims, he found himself performing before ministers, members of the royal family and at pashas' parties before the 1952 Revolution.

"Holding my lute and standing on a chair, I performed at King Farouk and Queen Farida's wedding party," recalls the musician. King Farouk presented the young El-Sayed with a royal thank-you note, which he has kept until today.

El-Sayed eventually formed his own troupe, calling it Nougoum Al-Husseini (Stars of the Shawqi Gonia's popular arts programme, one of the first broadcasts on Egyptian television. Later the group worked in the cinema and other television serials with well-known directors such as Yehia El-Alami and the late Nour El-Demerdash.

People respond well to Nougoum Al-Husseini's performances, according to the group's main singer, 60-year-old Ramadan Oweis. Oweis says the most requested songs are those which convey a message about wisdom and love — songs he calls *al-aghani al-Hamra* (red songs). Abdel-Halim Hafez's songs are also very popular.

Despite continuing audience enthusiasm, El-Sayed says the number of the troupe's Ramadan fans has been gradually declining during the past decade. Nougoum Al-Husseini depend almost entirely on money collected from the audience, save the small sum they receive from the Al-Darawish coffee shop. "What we get from the coffee shop hardly covers two players' daily wages," says El-Sayed.

But Sayed Imam, one of the group's singers vows, "Even if I get LE1000 in another place and only LE10 here, I'll keep working here. These are my roots. I owe my success to these people. How can I leave them?"



Scenes from Abdel-Aziz El-Sukkari's revamped "A Thousand and One Nights"



photos: Jihan Ammar



The Stars of Al-Husseini bring down the house at Al-Darawish coffee shop (above), as two furry members of the audience (top left) let the music rock them to sleep, and hand claps (top right) join the tabla for rhythm

Ramadan index

Number of people praying at the Masjid Al-Sharif in Mecca as you read this: 1,000,000
Chances that a helmeted officer is standing at a major intersection in Cairo at <i>maghrib</i> (iftar time): 1 in 2
Average speed of cars going through the intersection in different directions at the same time: 60 km/h
Minimum charge, not including beverages, per person at a top-notch "Ramadanic tent": LE40
Amount of meat in food being served there: 0
Operating cost per person at one of Cairo's biggest <i>mawa'id al-rahman</i> : LE2
Number of people served a free <i>iftar</i> meal there every day: 10,000
Number of food groups in meal: 4
Estimated total meals served during the entire month: 300,000 at a cost of LE600,000
Minutes of prime-time TV advertising that could be bought for the same price: 23.1
Price for an ad slot during prime time Ramadan TV, per 30 seconds: LE13,000
Number of ads shown nightly between 6:33 and 7:53 on Channel 1: 80
Minutes of programming during that same hour: 17
Number of ads for laundry detergent on Channel 1 between 6 and 8pm, per hour: 8
Number of different prize oriented programmes on Egyptian TV: 25
Total prize money offered by <i>Ramadan Riddles</i> , the most popular prize show, and its laundry detergent sponsor: LE100,000
Number of prize winners who will receive free laundry detergent for one year: 100
Percentage change in cash received by prize winners who can prove they are regular users of the laundry detergent: +200
Percentage change in revenues at the Eastern Tobacco Company during Ramadan: +4-5

Compiled by Tarek Atia, with apologies to Harper's Magazine

Sources: 1 Saudi Arabian Information Agency; 2,3 Weekly Research; 4,5 El-Menaharati, Salah Salem Road; 6,7,8,9 Al-Hagg Kamal Ismail, owner of the Al-Husseini ma'ida; 10,11 Americana advertising agency; 12,13 Weekly Research; 14 Abdel-Meguid Khedr, TV announcer; 15,16,17 Ramadan Riddles; 18 Mohamed Refaat Noguib, retired expert, Eastern Tobacco Company.

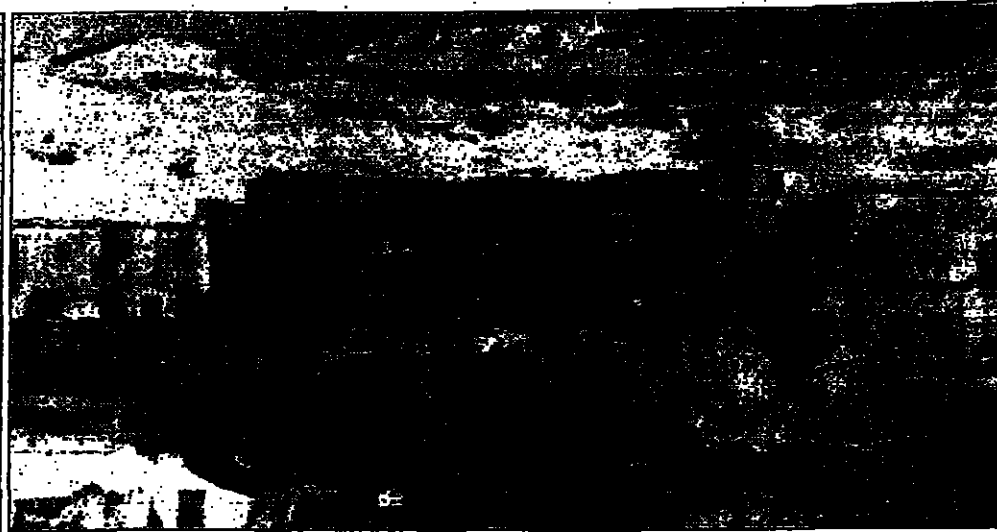
Edited by Fouad El-Gawhary

Secrets of Qurna

Living among buried treasures in the shadow of the Theban Hills, residents of Qurna adamantly reject relocation plans. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** and **Rehab Saad** uncovered some legendary motives



Village children carry on the long-held tradition of barter and trade around the noble's tomb at Qurna



Photos: Sherif Sorbel

Government plans to evacuate Qurna, a hilltop village on the western bank of the Nile and a honeycomb of ancient Egyptian tombs across the river from Luxor, have been met with a century-old resistance that remains alive today.

Citing their reliance on the tourism industry, the inadequate alternate housing proposed, and their wish to have continued access to their "ancestors' treasures, Qurna denizens insist on staying put. Their motivation and arguments are tinged with superstition and an unvoiced motive appears to be the desire to hunt for relics for sale under the counter.

Mohamed Abbas, for example, lives in an area of Qurna known as Naga's El-Horob, home to some of the most famed tombs, including the 130 tombs of Ramose. He strongly believes that a treasure — a golden waterwheel — is located in the courtyard of his house. The treasure or *al-kenz*, he says, is guarded by a *rasud*, a legendary creature that appears sporadically in the form of a snake. Unlike most Qurna dwellers who are reluctant to disclose family secrets concerning the antiquities that surround them, Abbas reveals the efforts he's made over the past two years to access his courtyard treasure; he has burned various types of Moroccan incense called *gust* and has recited magical spells. If he gets rid of the snake,

he says, "the treasure will be revealed, and we will be able to claim it for ourselves." He flatly refuses to move off this archaeological land, "at least not until we find the treasure," he adds with a smile.

Some claim to have seen such fruits come from the ground, like Hassan Rabie'a, a Qurna resident who says that rites to induce discoveries are often performed by a Muslim sheikh or a Coptic priest who hammer out a deal that would entitle them to one third of the excavated treasure. He's seen them come up with statuettes and papyrus texts.

Such beliefs in hidden treasures protected by *rasud* are dismissed as hearsay by antiquities officials. "People in Upper Egypt believe no more in *rasud* and demons than residents of the Delta," says Sabri Abdel-Aziz, chief antiquities inspector of the West Bank. Indeed, many residents dismiss the suggestion that antiquities lie beneath their homes. "There are about ten houses that contain parts of tombs, and they are known to antiquities officials and the police," claims one resident.

Qurna residents not only live in hilltop houses and inside its caves, but in ancient tombs that their families have inhabited long before the Napoleonic expedition. Though the tombs boasting decorated walls were progressively evacuated and — as is customary — barred from entry with iron grills, others have yet to be emptied. Many Qurna homes

have niches inscribed with ancient texts and dubbed "the stone door" or *bab al-hagar* — evidence that the home was once a tomb. And the authorities want them out.

An estimated 100,000 people inhabit about 15 villages at Qurna. Current relocation plans involve a newly developed village at Al-Tarif — to the north of Qurna on the desert fringes. According to city council sources, it is phase two of a plan that is already under way. The first phase involves relocating nine villages of Qurna into 1,500 housing units, 500 of which have been completed. Villagers are expected to be moved sometime next year. The second phase involves relocating the other villages to Al-Tarif.

Major General Ahmed Fouad, former head of the city's supreme council assured the *Weekly*, "All sorts of living facilities will be provided for them before they are moved."

But villages have been built before for the inhabitants of Qurna who have refused to budge. In 1945, for example, a royal decree was issued to remove them from Qurna and the distinguished architect Hassan Fathi was commissioned by the then Antiquities Department to design an alternate village. When completed, the people refused to yield an inch of their land. Fathi's "ideal community" was never inhabited and the plan to relocate the Qurna

residents was rendered moot. Even last winter, when the area was flooded and houses collapsed, residents refused to move to new houses allocated to flood victims. They preferred to rebuild their own houses themselves.

Chief antiquities inspector, Sabri Abdel-Aziz frets over the use of water and ovens by residents of Qurna in the tombs — practices that speed up their decay. If the whole village were relocated, he says, "the job of policemen would be much easier." Not only would the tombs be safeguarded, but perhaps even saved from plunder.

Half Ahmed Abul-Haggag, who has policed the Ramose area for the past 25 years, says at least five cases of illicit digging in the tombs are reported every year. And, he says, "hardly anybody is caught red-handed."

But residents reject the notion that their presence endangers the monuments, as well as insinuations that they are doing anything other than safeguarding the antiquities. "They are safe because we are here," says Abu El-Haggag, who is also a proud resident of Naga's El-Horob. "Once we move out, nobody would be left to guard the place day and night," he says.

As tombs and tourists often come hand in hand, many residents say that the relocation would pose a major threat to their livelihood — the sale of al-

abaster artefacts. In fact, the area teems with dozens of alabaster factories and vendors trade directly with the tourists. "El-Tarif doesn't have a tourist market for our products," complains one trader.

But the chief antiquities inspector of the West Bank claims that a tourist market could be established in El-Tarif: "Tourist guides are the ones who decide where to take tourists and they will become acquainted with the new location," says Sabri Abdel-Aziz.

Some residents boast that they themselves are a tourist attraction. "Tourists often like to stay in our houses for a day or two and many consider it the highlight of their trip," says Sayed Mar'ee, a local trader.

Many of the Qurna residents also refuse to move to El-Tarif because of inadequate housing. "We don't want houses like those of the flood victims," says one resident who complains that the new houses are too small for large families. "My house has six rooms and a big area for breeding animals," says Ramadgar Ali, "but the new houses have only two rooms." However, he would be willing to move if he could be assured of better living conditions, being all too familiar with the lack of proper sewage systems, electricity or clean water at Qurna.

Living through the test of time

Owner of the oldest bookshop in Luxor, Abdallah Gaddis has withstood the fluctuating tides of tourism from World War II to the post-Gulf War era. He and **Rehab Saad** flipped through the pages of history

Abdallah Gaddis was barely one year old when Howard Carter discovered the treasures of Tutankhamun in 1921 but he can relay his father's impression of the spectacular flux of tourists Luxor witnessed at the time. "It was the most successful year ever. Hundreds of aristocrats and members of the press flocked here to witness and cover the discovery," says Gaddis, who now runs the shop his father opened in 1907.

A seasoned member of the tourist industry, Gaddis has welcomed widely different customers during many seasons, eras and wars into the Gaddis bookstore that neighbors the legendary Winter Palace Hotel. He's shared conversation and books with the European elite, the habits of modern package-tours, with bargain-hunters and backpackers. And despite his versatility, he is definitely nostalgic

about the "good old days." "My clients were the world's richest and most elegant aristocrats; the cream of society," recalls the 74-year-old Gaddis. "They toured the sites in their best clothing; women in furs and elegant dresses and the men in suits."

But times were not always peachy. The wars Gaddis and his father witnessed often struck bad blows to business. But his father did manage to expand the store during World War II, when the British and American tenants of the surrounding three shops did not return to Egypt for the tourist season. "The owner asked my father if he would like to rent all three premises. He agreed and paid a nominal price for them."

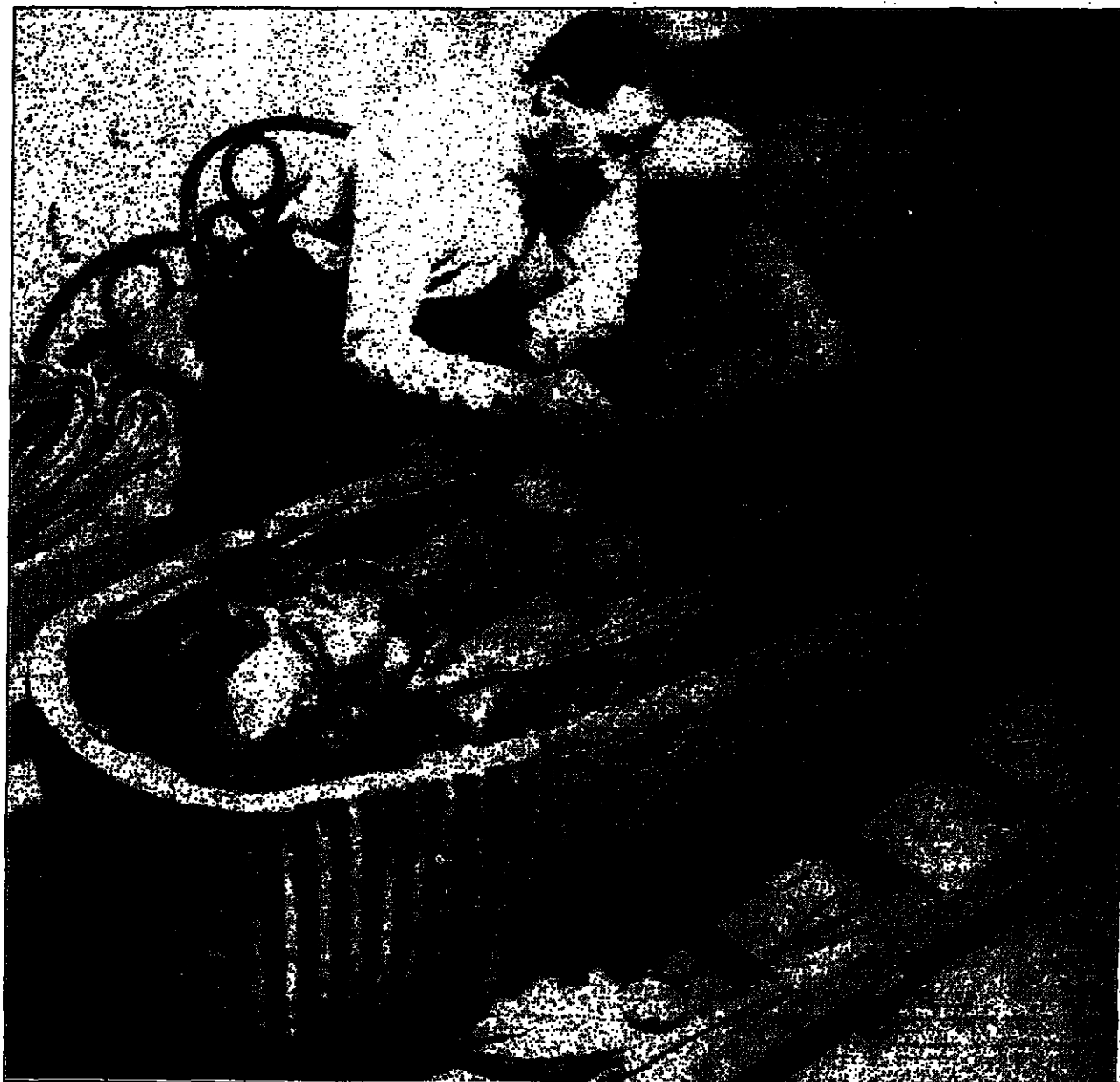
His father once sold silver and gold ware, learning trade secrets from his friends in Cairo's Khan Al-Khalili. He then turned the shops into one bookstore, specializing in books and photographs about Egypt, and particularly monuments. "My father was a pioneer in a field hitherto monopolized by Greeks and Jews," says Gaddis.

When Gaddis took over the bookstore in the late 1930s, he would often keep it open past midnight, long after the crowds of tourists had retreated to their hotels. "My clients could then quietly select their books and decide which photographs appealed to them." Not only was his bookstore frequented by the wealthy, but the wealthy were willing to spend heavily on his books, making LE1,000 or LE2,000 purchases, "a fortune in those days," says Gaddis. Now his customers spend no more than LE100 at a time.

He remembers that "only one Maltese officer and 25 Egyptian soldiers" guarded the monuments of Luxor, Karnak and the Nile's west bank in the 1930s, and only 40 guides, or *torgomen*, toured the sites with visitors. "They wore traditional caftan, turban or *emma* (turban)" he recalls. "They were cultured, though not necessarily university graduates. They were enthusiastic readers of ancient history of which they acquired profound knowledge. And they spoke English or French, or both."

He recalls that The Winter Palace Hotel would have the guides work in rotation. If a group of 50 tourists arrived, for example, four were allocated one tour guide at LE2 a day. "At the end of the trip the visitors usually gave an envelope to the guide containing LE100 in appreciation of his efforts. That was a good income then." But conditions for the *torgomen* changed in the 1960s when they became too old to work.

Luxor also had a fixed tourist season at the time: from mid-December to the end of March, and the hotels would open only during those four months, recalls Gaddis. Egypt was still under British occupation and Luxor was not heavily populated. During off-season, he says, "it was unusual to see a single pedestrian before noon. Only a few fruit, vegetable and clothing shops were open."



One of the historical photographs taken by Abdallah's father include the above one of Howard Carter unwrapping Tutankhamun's mummy

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This changed after President Gamal Abdel-Nasser made a visit to Luxor in November of 1952.

"He met with local businessmen," recalls Gaddis, "and we told him that we wanted the hotels to stay open all year round. When Nasser asked us if we could guarantee tourists throughout the year, we suggested carrying out a two-year experiment. It proved so successful that all the hotels opened in the summer and the winter."

But business has never been good during wars, says Gaddis. A few years before the outbreak of World War II, a worldwide economic depression drastically affected tourist movement to Egypt, and consequently Luxor. "In place of wealthy tour-

ists," said Gaddis, "British soldiers were brought in large numbers by Eastman Travel to see the monuments of Upper Egypt."

At that time as well, he says, Egyptians began to visit Luxor. "They would leave Cairo and Alexandria in the winter to

of visitors for three years. They were anxious to take a last look at the temples at their original sites before they were dismantled and transported to other locations. Hotels were full."

But then there was the June 1967 War. "On the day the war broke out, there was not a single empty room in Luxor. We had three bad months before tourism revived," says Gaddis whose bookstore was exempted from rent for one year by the government.

Gaddis believes that the most severe tourist slump came during the Gulf War, and to an extent not even seen during the wars with Israel. "When the Americans shot the first bullet in the Gulf, there was not a single tourist in Luxor. Conditions improved after the war but then terrorism followed and tourism dropped again."

And Gaddis hoped that he would be exempted from the war but then terrorism followed and tourism dropped again.

Today, books about Egypt in English, French, German and Arabic fill the shelves of the bookstore and potential buyers have a large choice of publications, from the famous *Blue Guide* and *Insights Guides*, to specialized books, souvenir publications and coffee-table editions. Never before have the shelves of Gaddis been so heavily stocked.



Two obelisks at Karnak



Abdallah Gaddis in his bookstore, established in 1907, recalling the good old days

Travellers' book guide

Bigger and better

COFFEE-table books on ancient Egypt are nothing new, but this one is different. *Egypt: Temples, Men and Gods* by Alberto Siliotti may well qualify for the Guinness Book of Records so far as both size and quality are concerned. First published in 1994 in Great Britain by Thames and Hudson and now published in Egypt by AA Gaddis and Saad, it presents a panorama of Egyptian civilisation, ancient and modern but mostly ancient — through pictures of superb quality and texts written in language that is concise, precise and easy to grasp.

It is not just an elegant and colourful book, but a highly informative one as well. The author has studied and researched ancient Egypt for many years and is a member of the Franco-Egyptian Mission and director of the Thebes Project, a scheme to catalogue tomb paintings on computer. His ability to transmit this knowledge is clear. Beginning with a geographic and historical introduction which puts the important sites and the monuments they house into historical context, the book takes the reader along the Nile Valley, to the Delta, the oases, the Fayoum, Sinai and Nubia.

A feature of *Egypt: Temples, Men and Gods*, is that every object is presented with clear reference to its provenance, and information about the site itself. This gives the reader a chance to observe them, not as isolated artifacts in a museum display case, but within their historical and geographical setting.

The placing of objects in context is helped by a stylised fold-out map that extends from the Delta to Abu Simbel, and another of Western Thebes. A three-dimensional reconstruction has been drawn of the secret necropolis of Tanis, and another of the complex system of chambers formed by five blocks of stone and empty spaces, designed to lessen the strain of the enormous mass of stone above the burial chamber of the Great Pyramid of Giza. These have been drawn by architect Luca Rossi, who worked in collaboration with the Franco-Egyptian Mission.

But don't imagine that this book is only about ancient Egypt; it covers the birth of modern Egypt with a reproduction of the Battle of Abu Sir, unique maps made by 15th and 16th century travellers, biographies of some of the "great men", like Champlain, who deciphered hieroglyphs, Belzoni who transported great obelisks across the sea to adorn the museums of the world, and David Roberts, whose paintings record the era when Egypt was in the process of being "discovered" by the West. Howard Carter and his discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamun has not been forgotten, nor the 1989 discovery of statues in Luxor Temple, now on view in Luxor Museum.

The dust jacket of *Egypt: Temples, Men and Gods* features a close-up of the solid gold funerary mask of Tutankhamun. It does not, however, give the title of the book. Credits are inside, enhanced by a photograph of five solar deities on a star-spangled sky.

The photographs on the double-page spreads that follow are of superb quality, and always accompanied by informative captions: a gold-leaf plaque belonging to Queen Hent-Tawwy, we are told, was originally found placed over the embalming incision made in her abdomen to extract the viscera during mummification; a gold and blue faience pectoral features the image of the sun disk sailing in a barge on the "eternal ocean"; a close up of relief portraits of the Vizier Ramose and his wife, with details of their wigs, jewels and sensitive facial expressions, are considered among the finest examples of 18th Dynasty art.

More accolades are unnecessary. The book, printed in Italy, is a worthwhile, if expensive, contribution to any personal library. It is available at all major bookshops.

Reviewed by **Jill Kamil**

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Weah is the future

Some African countries almost moved heaven and earth to participate in the ACN, others should have just moved aside, writes **Tarek El-Tablawy**

The fifteen countries who travelled to South Africa to participate in the 20th African Cup of Nations (ACN) each arrived in Johannesburg with dreams of proving themselves to be the first and only power in African soccer. With two weeks of competition now over, four countries — South Africa, Ghana, Zambia and Tunisia — still have a shot at realising this dream after breaking free from the rest to qualify for the semifinals.

So far, it is anybody's guess as to who may walk away with the cup. The odds are on Ghana, ranked first in Africa and 19th in the world, and which has won two of the last three world championships for players under-17. But, regardless of which team emerges triumphant, the real victory has already been secured — Africa has put aside the wars, famines, plagues and turmoil long enough to unite under perhaps the most arcane of all things, football.

Thousands of cheering fans from all over Africa rose from their seats when the Liberian team made its ACN debut. Led by George Weah, the world and continent's best football player, the team walked onto the field for their first match confident that whatever lay ahead would be smoother sailing than the civil war they had endured for five years. They were right. Although they didn't make it beyond the quarterfinals due to a 2-0 loss to Zaire, Weah and his teammates were not too disappointed. "Today I'll be the happiest man in the world," said Weah as he stood next to South African President Nelson Mandela on 27 January. Weah and Mandela symbolise the kind of triumph over hardship that has made these two figures role models in the eyes of the continent's children. "He is the pride of Africa," Mandela said of the Liberian-born AC Milan star who was also named the European and African player of the year.

Other competing countries also faced numerous crunches to get to the ACN. Cameroon missed the flight to Johannesburg because they hadn't received the plane tickets from their country's football federation. Sierra Leone's players threatened to walk out of the competition because their daily allowances were slashed from \$50 to \$30.

But on the sidelines, other controversies erupted as various candidates used the ACN as a campaign stop in a bid for the presidency of the Federation of International Football Associations (FIFA). These examples of politicking were compounded by petty arguments, snide comments and poor sportsmanship and teamwork. The spirit of cooperation and unity, in these instances, unfortunately, failed to prevail.

On the home front, reports Sayed Hendawi from Johannesburg, Egypt lost 3-1 to Zambia, knocking them out of the competition and reopening the chick-

en and egg argument concerning who was responsible for the team's shoddy performance throughout the championship.

The Egyptian national team's Dutch coach, Ruud Krol, once again came under fire, this time for replacing Ali Maher with the defensive player, Fawzy Gamal, ten minutes after the beginning of the second half against Zambia. With critics breathing down his neck and pointing an accusatory finger in his direction, Krol explained, "I made the exchange to overcome some weaknesses in the team's performance." These weaknesses, Krol added, are a result of the players' poor physical conditioning, which they did little to work on, refusing to accept the three-days-a-week training schedule prior to the ACN competition.

The players were even less original in their complaints. "This is the worst game I have ever played," said Hazem Inam, who was expected to score at least two goals in the game. "I don't know what happened to me."

Inam's teammate, Magdi Tolba was more forthcoming. He blamed the Egyptian Football Federation (EFF) which responded by announcing that it is considering changing the whole team in the near future.

But while Krol, the EFF, the team and critics were busy speculating on why the team did so poorly, other teams were channeling their energy into something more useful—the game at hand, for example. Less interested in blaming and defaming, the Tunisian team defeated Gabon 4-1 to become the only North African country to make it into the semifinals. Algeria, the only other North African competitor, other than Egypt, was also knocked out of the running in the quarterfinals.

Several lessons can be learned by comparing Egypt and Liberia. What the Liberian team was missing in terms of money and morale was made up for, or provided by Weah. Egypt, which was more concerned with attempting to find scapegoats for a shoddy performance, even before the team left for Johannesburg, had only one responsibility—to focus on the game at hand. Instead, the team, the coach and the federation argued, hurled accusations, made insinuations, and debated the virtues of fasting while refusing to substitute physical training for resting. In all, the team did just about everything it could to undermine its own performance while being aided by bureaucratic infighting and slighting.

Brazil's legendary football star, Pele, recently asserted that the future of the game lies with the Africans, and he is probably right. But, while African countries slowly but surely get used to football's increasing professionalism, Egypt's players may just have to keep putting away, preferably at the ball, but most probably at each other.



Zambian goal-scorer Dannius Lois is tackled by Egyptian scorer Ibrahim Samir on ground in the quarterfinals match photo:AFP

Squash and squander

Bad planning and some heel-dragging have left the junior squash team without a coach and, Amir Wagih, hanging. **Eman Abdel-Moeti reports**



Amir Wagih trying to prove himself as a professional as well as a coach

Five months before the start of the World Juniors Squash Championship, which will be held in Cairo, the Egyptian Squash Federation (ESF) has yet to give a definite answer on whether Amir Wagih, a member of the seniors team, will coach the junior team.

In a meeting held last week, attended by the ESF's president, Ibrahim Amin and the manager, Mahmoud Barada, Wagih was informally presented with a contract that would be signed after Amin presents the training plan and the outlines of the necessary budget to the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS).

However, Barada now claims that the federation is still considering other candidate coaches such as Ahmed Safwat, Alaa Allouba, Wagdi El-Batran, Magdi Shatha and Talba Hussein, as well as Wagih. Moreover, even if the choice had been finalised, the junior team has no coach yet because the SCYS has only handed over half of the necessary LE400,000. "There is no money for a coach," said Amin.

Wagih, who had previously coached the junior team under a contract extending from 1989 to 1994, believes it to be just a matter of time before the new contract is signed. In good faith, Wagih will again begin to train the juniors after Ramadan, and has even come up with a plan to bring Paul Gregory (world-ranked 18), Paul Johnson (26) and Gary Wirt (28), to play some friendly matches against the team. "Bringing them over from England will be cheaper than having the team travel," he said.

With no coach and no fixed training pattern, members of the junior team are left to fend for themselves. But, the team members, Ahmed Faizi, Karim El-Mistikawi and Amr Shabana are in favour of having Wagih for their coach. His age, experience and manner make him someone they can relate to.

Wagih has been informally coaching the junior team after his contract expired in 1994, and is optimistic about their chances. Ahmed Faizi, he said, who won the British Open recently, is favoured to win the individual's event in the World Championship in July. And Amr Shabana, who trains at the Gezira Club with Wagih, is another strong up-and-comer.

But, ready to throw a blanket over the sparks of enthusiasm is the ESF which is waiting for approval of their plan by the SCYS. This could take months, leaving the players fending for themselves and slowly reducing their chance to place in the top three positions in the championship.

Boxers' lose round one

The boxing team takes on the NOC for the right to travel to the Olympics and, writes **Abeer Anwar**, round one goes to the bureaucrats

Mustafa El-Qulini, Egypt's under 57kg amateur boxer, is not very popular right now. When the National Olympic Committee released the list with the names of those athletes who would travel to the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, Qulini was the only boxer listed. This, naturally, did not win him any votes with his fellow teammates or with boxing federation officials.

Explaining the reasoning behind the NOC's decision, Hassan Mustafa, the NOC's secretary said, "We chose El-Qulini from all those listed by the Egyptian Boxing Federation's (EBF) technical committee because he was the only one to rank sixth in the 1994 World Championship."

But according to Abdel-Aziz Ghoneim, the national team's coach: "There's more than one

boxer that meets the criteria and standards set by the NOC. In the 1995 World Championship in Berlin, three of our boxers were able to take fifth place in their weight divisions."

Moreover, a recent list of amateur rankings issued by the International Amateur Boxing Federation (IABF) on 5 January revealed that Egypt's Mahmoud Khalifa, Amr Mustafa, Qabari Salem were ranked fifth in the world in their respective weight class and Ahmed El-Sayed was ranked eighth. El-Qulini, surprisingly, has slipped in rankings to 13th.

In a statement forwarded to the NOC by the EBF, federation officials asserted that El-Qulini was currently serving a one-month suspension from the national team for skipping practice. At 31-years of age, El-

Qulini is no spring chicken, and risks being knocked out cold-murky if he cuts practice. The statement added that El-Qulini did not participate in the last International Boxing Championship held in December 1995.

Presented with these new findings, the NOC removed El-Qulini from the list of those travelling and, adding insult to injury, declared that no other members of the team would go in his place until all the facts are considered. "We still have to reconsider the international rankings of the Egyptian boxers and make sure that they will be able to achieve something in Atlanta," said the NOC's Mustafa. "Only then will we entertain the possibility of sending the boxing team to the Olympics."

The hard-headedness of this

move surprised even the most hard-headed of all people — boxers. "Why should we train hard when it will all be for nothing," said the world number five ranked Amr Mustafa (over 91kg category). The NOC, however, begged to differ. "They have been allocated a budget from the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, and so they have to complete their training," said Mustafa of the NOC. The team, the NOC official said, should be ready at any time in case the NOC decides that some of the boxers will travel.

"We will have to go on with our training plans whether we travel or not," said Ghoneim. "We have no choice." The team will probably train for the upcoming African Championships in March which will be held in Berlin.



Photo: Amr Mohamed

HORSING AROUND: The Arab Police Equestrian Federation last week organised the 4th Arab Show Jumping Championship at the police pitches in Basatin. The two-day event attracted more than 30 competitors from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Tunisia, Syria and Egypt, and large number of spectators including Egyptian Minister of Interior Major-General Hassan El-Alfi. On the first day, Saudi Arabia's Khalid Abdel-Aziz and Fahd Awad won two first places with third place going to Major-General Ahmed El-Sawal of Egypt. In the overall results, Saudi Arabia's Ramzi Al-Dahmani took first, Tunisia's Habib Al-Awady, second and Fahd Ibrahim of the UAE, third.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

Lisez dans



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Mohamed Salmawy



Président
et Rédacteur en Chef
Ibrahim Nafie

En vente tous les mercredis

Essam El-Hinnawi: Global thinking

He is green, that much is certain, and something of a renegade. He scoffs at the hand-me-down certainties and political wrangling that are leading the planet to ruin

More than three decades of wide-ranging scientific research have only confirmed Essam El-Hinnawi's scepticism regarding current environmental management policies and issues. We are sitting in his remarkably uncluttered office at the National Research Centre (NRC): a computer on one side of the room and an atomic absorption spectrophotometer on the other, the man himself seated in between, speaking in fervent, ringing tones about environmental degradation, pausing only when coffee is brought.

He will divulge little about himself that does not directly relate to his field of work, it soon becomes apparent. But then, some would argue that there is a certain amount of idiosyncrasy in his dissenting views on issues of global concern, and in the image he projects of the scientist whose sound predictions about local environmental problems have not always been heeded. El-Hinnawi's public opinions aside, his scientific credentials remain impeccable — as witnessed in his long-standing UN assignments.

Born in 1936 in Sayeda Zeinab, El-Hinnawi was raised in Cairo, then in Tanta, where his father's government job took the family. His specialisation was acquired by one of the coincidences which so often result in major life changes. Having joined Alexandria University's Faculty of Science in 1951, El-Hinnawi initially opted to study Botany. During his first lecture in the department, however, the superabundance of Latin names so put him off that he rushed out to the registrar, demanding to be transferred to any other department. "They transferred me to Geology. I didn't even know what geology was," he laughs.

Back in Tanta after graduation, El-Hinnawi applied for a job at a major foreign company and was gratified to receive a letter of acceptance. But chance was to serve him up with yet another twist: the following day, the 1956 war broke out, and foreign corporations were nationalised. It was then that El-Hinnawi applied to the NCR and started research towards an MSc in mineralogy with Professor Rittman, a Swiss expert in crystallography then teaching at Cairo University. When his professor moved to the International Institute of Vulcanology in Catania, Italy, El-Hinnawi managed to land a scholarship, following Rittman to study for a PhD in geo-chemistry under his supervision. The proximity of the institute to Mount Etna, "which sometimes became active at the time", no doubt provided El-Hinnawi with ample primary material.

Returning to Egypt in 1961 to write up his thesis, El-Hinnawi married a colleague from the NCR, Fatma El-Gohari, who had just been granted a scholarship to work on her PhD in Germany. El-Hinnawi also moved to Germany, working there as a visiting researcher at the Technical University of Hannover. Back in Egypt in 1966, El-Hinnawi resumed his work at the NCR, which enabled him to branch out of the confines of his field of specialisation, co-operating with other institutions on research that treats the environment as a totality. The seventies for him seem to have been a decade of multi-disciplinary surveys of the most polluted regions in Egypt, and a time for collaboration with other scientists on the formulation of long-term, though oft overlooked, environmental policies.

The establishment of the Academy of Scientific Research further opened the scope for such work, and in his capacity as sec-



Photo: Sherif Soudki

retary-general of its Environmental Research Council (1974-76), El-Hinnawi and a team of researchers identified and studied those zones of Egypt most environmentally damaged. Air pollution in Greater Cairo (particularly in Helwan and Shubra) and in Alexandria ranked top on their list of priorities. "This was the true beginning of all such studies of environmental problems in Egypt", comments El-Hinnawi with remarkable aplomb. He tempers it with a reservation: "There are written solutions to all these problems".

The mid-seventies also marked the beginning of his collaboration with renowned Egyptian scientist Mustafa Tolba, former executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), an association that was to culminate with El-Hinnawi's post as senior consultant to the UNEP. Among his most outstanding assignments was the preparation of the *State of Environment 1972-1992* analytical report presented by the UNEP at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

His many international commissions notwithstanding, El-Hinnawi does not refrain from expressing unorthodox views, be it on local or global environmental problems. Broach any topic relating to alleged crises, and he will proceed to disentangle hard-core scientific facts from what he considers to be unsubstantiated political propaganda. Take, for example, his views on the depletion of the ozone layer. El-Hinnawi's scepticism about the issue seems in part prompted by his awareness — common to many scientists —

of the fact that politics interfere all too often in the implementation of scientific opinions.

"In the early seventies, Concorde aircraft came into use. These attain altitudes approaching the stratosphere, and two American scientists said that this was one of the reasons for ozone depletion. But it was the era of the arms race, and their opinions were hushed up: an example of a political decision detrimental to the environment." He outlines the next phase in the quick, clipped tones of one who has gone through all this many times: the identification of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) as the main culprits in ozone depletion, their gradual removal from many products in keeping with the 1986 Montreal Protocol. He himself, however, is not necessarily persuaded by the dire doom-mongering of the tabloid press reports which claim that the ozone layer is rapidly dwindling into nothingness. El-Hinnawi is of the conviction that the ozone layer diminishes periodically, and only between the latitudes of 30-60 north as well as in the south pole. Thus, in his opinion, not only is the problem less drastic than it appears, but it does not concern many Third World countries which fall within the equatorial zone. "These countries, furthermore, do not produce freon (which contains CFCs), which is produced by Europe and the US. Yet they have created institutions that, among other things, encourage developing countries to use alternatives to freon — a multi-million dollar business."

His views on the conflict over water resources as the so-called forthcoming Middle Eastern war are no less dissident. "All this talk of an obviously contrived 'water crisis' was created in American scientific circles. In reality there is not so much a crisis as a lack of awareness of the rational use of resources," he posits. He points to the enormous waste of water in homes: taps left dripping, pipes leaking. As to water waste in agriculture, in 1975 El-Hinnawi himself compiled a report on the environmental impact of the High Dam which was eventually communicated to then President Sadat. In it, El-Hinnawi recommended that the ancient Egyptian irrigation system of basin flooding be replaced by a network of sub-soil drainage pipes to prevent water logging caused by alterations of the hydrological cycle wrought by the High Dam. At the

time, the solution was dismissed as being too costly. "But see how much it costs now with inflation," El-Hinnawi sighs.

Should you mention air pollution in any of Egypt's big cities, El-Hinnawi is armed with charts and tables containing all the relevant data, down to the amount of lead found in the blood-stream of traffic wardens. Should you breezily opine that the problem of sewage and industrial water disposal into the sea in Alexandria would be solved if the waste water were used for reclaiming the desert after adequate treatment, he is likely to disagree: the question, to his mind, is not where to dispose of waste, but the fact that industrial waste requires separate treatment as it prevents biological degradation. But if El-Hinnawi himself sometimes sounds like a prophet of environmental doom, it is because he is all too aware of the absence in Egypt of an environmental body adequately endowed with executive powers.

But what of the Environment Law of 1994? The question triggers an outburst from El-Hinnawi: "It's full of loopholes — it was formulated in great haste. Besides, nowhere else in the world is there such a thing as a 'unified environment law'; in any advanced country you find hundreds of environment laws — for water pollution, air pollution, soil pollution... etc. — each enforced by the relevant ministry. And why is it that experts are never sought out here when such laws are formulated?"

So is the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) inadequate? "This organisation has a very dubious position. When a breach in environmental policy occurs, the authorities say: 'Our task is coordination, not execution.' When environmental laws are violated, they say they are not responsible and when sound environmental measures are taken, they take the credit," he concludes. He takes his next jab at the way the functions of three ministries — environment, the public business sector and administrative development — operate under the umbrella of a single ministry in Egypt. "That one minister should shoulder all these responsibilities, particularly given the complex problems of developing countries — he needs to be a superman," concludes El-Hinnawi.

Profile by Ragi Halim

Pack of cards

by Madame Sosostri

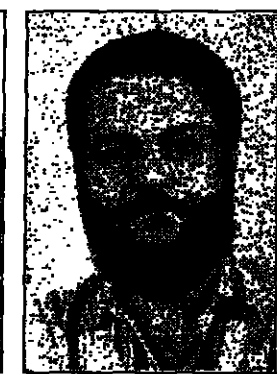
♥ Aah... a new year... a time for romance and joyous beginnings. And for three good friends of mine here at the *Weekly*, a time to bring in the year with an unforgettable occasion. Nora Koloyan and Nagla Ghali's weddings took place recently. But as far as embracing on a life of marital bliss, they were beaten to it by Magdi El-Amir, the *Weekly*'s very own right-hand man, who has at times literally brought us back to life by providing sustenance and sometimes even sanity with endless steaming hot mugs of tea and coffee. Magdi was married to the enchanting Intisar Atta; a good time was had by all as we danced in the street to the hypnotic beat of the *tablas* and clapped with delight as Magdi donned fez and *abiyah* and performed a rather impressive jig. And if this hidden talent of his surprised us all, then we were in for an even bigger surprise almost one week later when the usually quiet and docile Nagla caused quite a few jaws to drop as she fidgeted and walked up and down the aisle babbling away to her guests throughout her whole wedding ceremony at the Catholic Church in Corba, Heliopolis. Not even colleagues Ghada Ragab, Nevine Wahab, Aziza Sami and Nevine El-Aref could stop her. One of the main reasons though, I'm sure, for her sudden silence was the shock of seeing her husband, Nadim Zammar, who had gone through the evening looking most dignified and distinguished, let loose and dive headlong into an impressive belly-dancing routine like there was no tomorrow. Nagla and Nadim left for their new home in Cleveland, Ohio last week and, as far as I'm concerned, will probably wish that they never had. Nora and Ara Keabedian, on the other hand, are now cruising along the Nile, blissfully basking in the winter sun, looking deeply into each other's eyes and remembering



Louis Tawfiq at work on a masterpiece



Dalia El-Nasser



Mohamed Shebl

their wedding day with joy. Held in the Armenian Church on Ramses Street, and in Armenian, the wedding ceremony was, to say the very least, intriguing. Nora looked stunning as usual, and Ara as stoic as ever, but what was actually being said, dears, went way over my head. The reception which followed, however, at the Armenian Club in Heliopolis, involved a lot more social interaction. Taking up the entrance and the whole first floor of the club, the reception involved a good bit of dancing on the part of all the guests. But that was after, of course, Nora and Ara had danced their first slow-dance together as husband and wife and made the difference in height between them glaringly obvious. Only to those who were watching, of course. I for one had my eye set on the four-tier wedding cake, and once I had consumed as much of it as I could and

said hello to my colleagues from the *Weekly*, including Hosny Gaidy, his wife Moushira and daughter Yasmine, layout editor Samir Sobhi and his wife Ikhlas, Galal Nasser, Khaled El-Ghamri and Nermin El-Nawawi, I could then relax, sit back and enjoy Nora and Ara's most impressive singing and belly-dancing routines.

♥ I know, I know. With the *Weekly* profiling a marvellous personality on this very page each week, it's probably very difficult to keep track of every single person. But even if you had read about her over a year ago, dears, it would be very difficult, to have already forgotten Leila El-Hamamsi, the renowned anthropologist. Even now, Leila is still being recognised for her remarkable work in her field, and just recently she was awarded

the American Anthropological Association's Presidential Award, the most important award in anthropology, for her "outstanding contributions to the field" and especially her "creation of a forum for anthropologists in the Arab world."

♥ Having his work exhibited in Switzerland is nothing new to Louis Tawfiq, the deaf-mute artist profiled by the *Weekly* last year. The Galerie de l'Art Brut in Lausanne already boasts two of his paintings in its collection, and in Micheline Vorbe Fallet's Galerie Fallet in Geneva, an exhibition entitled *Un Autre Regard* (Another Look) opened last week and includes Louis' most recent works, alongside those of Azziz Elili, Dominique Jossesma and Jacques Receveur. Those of you lucky enough have until March to catch the exhibition. The rest of you will just have to be content with seeing his work which is currently on display at the Atelier Gallery downtown.

♥ When I say that my love of cheesecake goes as far as my having written several odes dedicated to that glorious dessert, I speak nothing but the truth: "A single

slice of cheesecake on a plate/Topped with cherries, strawberries or cream/A gift from heaven — not some dream/Cut with a fork and sample the taste/While praying it travels not straight to my hips/Another slice or two... oh grieve the rest... I cannot wait." And now, finally, a small part of heaven will come to Cairo, in the guise of a genuine Californian cheesecake company, offering imported cheesecakes in more than forty-eight flavours! There was absolutely no way I could refuse an invitation by the American Embassy's Commercial Counsellor Laron Janssen, in that case, to attend a reception attended by journalists and businessmen to celebrate the glorious occasion.

♥ There's only one way a man can really show how much he cares, and that's by providing a little PFC: perfume, fashion and cosmetics. When my good friend public relations manager of the Meridien Heliopolis Nihal Zamzam called to tell me that the famous perfume and cosmetics expert Yvette Moretti was in town, I thought there would be no harm in going to attend just a few of the presentation sessions she would be giving. Alas! How wrong I was. Never before, in fact, has so much harm been done. I may have walked out smelling like a rose, dressed like a queen, and with enough make-up on my face to mix with cement and build a house, but there is currently a hole in my wallet that not even a tonne of that designer cement can possibly fix.

♥ When the American Research Centre in Egypt (ARCE) and Columbia Uni-

versity decided to hold a three-day film workshop in New York in March focusing on the treatment of religion and popular culture on Egyptian television and cinema, I knew it would be just a matter of time before they contacted Mohamed Shebl. Some of you may have heard him as a DJ on Radio Cairo, or as the *Weekly*'s film critic, or as a cult film director. Personally, I've been exposed to Mohamed as all three. And it was because I was also such a good friend of his that Mohamed recently told me that one of the films he is most proud of is *Fangs*, his Egyptian version of *Dracula*, with popular singer Ahmed Adaweys as the eminent Count. For the time being, however, the film that will participate in the "Secularism, Islam and Popular Culture" film workshop is Shebl's *The Trial*, a documentary on renowned director Youssef Chahine and the controversy surrounding his most recent film, *Al-Muhajer*.

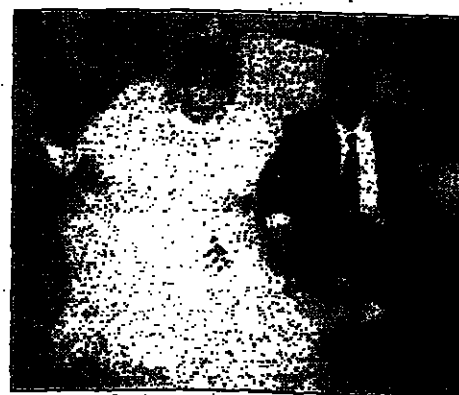
♥ I recently attended the viva of my dear friend Dalia Abdel-Rahman El-Nasser. The judging committee included none other than the head of the Animation Department at the Higher Institute for Cinema Ahmed El-Metwally, who was also Dalia's advisor; her examiner, vice-dean of the institute, Yehya Azam; guest examiner professor of animation at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Mona El-Sabbah. Lover as I am of good music and good cartoons, what a surprise it was then to discover that the theme of my good friend's Masters thesis, for which she received the rather worthy grade of 'excellent', was the creative role of the soundtrack in Walt Disney's animation films, namely *Beauty and the Beast*, *Pinochio*, *Dumbo* and *Bambi*. The subject in question is dear to my heart — I remember when Walt himself suggested making a cartoon out of my own life, naturally I refused, and even though the project itself was aborted, the song I'm the King of the Swingers did later appear in the *Jungle Book*.



Leila El-Hamamsi (left); Nora, Ara, and their *Weekly* entourage



Nagla and Nadim — Ohio on the horizon



Magdi and Intisar — peek-a-boo